

# SOLICITORS DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL

IN THE MATTER OF THE SOLICITORS ACT 1974

Case No. 12657-2024

## **BETWEEN:**

SOLICITORS REGULATION AUTHORITY LTD

Applicant

and

RYAN SEAN JACK WILLIAMS

Respondent

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Before:

Mrs L Boyce (Chair)

Mr G Sydenham

Mr P Hurley

Date of Hearing: 28-31 October 2025, 3-4 November 2025  
& 18-20 February 2026

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## **Appearances**

James Counsell KC, counsel, Outer Temple Chambers, The Outer Temple, 222 Strand, London, WC2R 1BA instructed by Capsticks LLP for the Applicant

Jeremy Phillips KC, counsel, Francis Taylor Building, Inner Temple, London, EC4Y 7BY for the Respondent.

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**JUDGMENT**

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## Allegations

1. The allegations made by the SRA against the Respondent, Ryan Sean Jack Williams, are that as a solicitor, while in practice as a Partner at SBP Law (“the Firm”):
  - 1.1 He made comments that were offensive, inappropriate, and/or discriminatory, in that:
    - 1.1.1 In or around March 2021, he said to Colleague A words to the effect that Jewish people ‘*don’t suffer from antisemitism and only have security outside of synagogues because they have lots of money and can pay for security and police,*’ and/or
    - 1.1.2 On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he referred to an individual in a boxing match using words to the effect of ‘*tall, large nigger,*’ and/or
    - 1.1.3 On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he repeatedly used the term ‘*nigger,*’ and/or
    - 1.1.4 On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he said to Colleague A words to the effect of ‘*racism to Jews doesn’t exist, antisemitism doesn’t exist, you’re all on top,*’ and/or
    - 1.1.5 On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he said to Colleague A words to the effect of ‘*you only got your job because you are Jewish,*’ and/or
    - 1.1.6 On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he said to Colleague A words to the effect of ‘*you Jewish people think you’re better than everyone else,*’ and/or
    - 1.1.7 On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he said to Colleague B words to the effect of ‘*did you see [Colleague J’s] big Jew hands.*’

And in doing so breached one or more of Paragraph 1.1 and 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs and RFLs 2019 (“the SRA Code of Conduct”), and one or more of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the SRA Principles 2019 (“the 2019 Principles”)
  - 1.2. He made comments that were inappropriate, unwanted, and/or sexual either to, or about his colleagues:
    - 1.2.1. On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he asked Colleague C whether he was sleeping with Colleague D, and he said to Colleague C words to the effect that Colleague D was ‘*the best one here,*’ and/or
    - 1.2.2. On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he told a group of colleagues that he had told Colleague C that he should have sex with Colleague D. Specifically, the Respondent is alleged to have said that he had told Colleague C words to the effect of ‘*what are you waiting for you just need to bend her over*’ or ‘*just bend her over and fuck her,*’ and/or

1.2.4. On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he said to Colleague A words to the effect of ‘*you know you want me*’, and/or

And in doing so breached one or more of Paragraph 1.1 and Paragraph 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct, and one or more of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.

1.3 He touched several of his colleagues in an inappropriate, unwanted, and/or sexual manner:

1.3.2 On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he touched Colleague F’s bottom and/or

1.3.3 On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he slapped Colleague B’s inner thigh and/or pinched Colleague B’s bottom

And in doing so he breached one or more of Paragraph 1.1 and Paragraph 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct, and one or more of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.

1.4 In addition, allegations 1.2 and 1.3 are advanced on the basis that the Respondent’s conduct was sexually motivated. This is alleged as an aggravating feature of the Respondent’s conduct but are not an essential ingredient in proving the allegations.

### **Executive Summary**

2. The Respondent was admitted to the Roll on 15 January 2013. At the time of the misconduct, he was a partner at the Firm, based in its London office, where he practised in litigation.
3. On 7 February 2022, a self-report was made to the SRA on behalf of the Respondent. The self-report stated that the Firm had commenced an internal investigation into alleged conduct by the Respondent and that witness statements had been taken from staff. The Respondent resigned from, and left, the Firm on 28 February 2022.
4. The SRA received a report from the Firm on 28 February 2022. That report disclosed allegations that the Respondent had made antisemitic comments in the workplace in March 2021 and had behaved inappropriately at, or following, two work-related social events. Following its investigation, an Authorised Decision Maker of the SRA decided to refer the Respondent’s conduct to the Tribunal.
5. The allegations concerned antisemitic, racist, and sexualised comments made by the Respondent towards his colleagues, together with allegations that he touched several colleagues in an inappropriate, unwanted, and sexual manner.
6. The Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Principles 2, 5, and 6 of the SRA Principles 2019 and paragraphs 1.1 and 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct for Solicitors, RELs, and RFLs 2019.
7. The Tribunal further found that, in relation to the allegations concerning the touching and pinching of colleagues’ bottoms, the Respondent’s misconduct was sexually motivated.

8. The Tribunal ordered that the Respondent be suspended from practice as a solicitor for a period of 12 months.

### **Sanction**

9. The Tribunal ordered that the Respondent be SUSPENDED from practice as a solicitor for a period of 12 months commencing on 20 February 2026. The Tribunal's sanction and its reasoning on sanction can be found [[here](#)].

### **Documents**

10. The Tribunal reviewed all the documents submitted by the parties, which included (but was not limited to):
- Rule 12 Statement and Exhibit JHT1 dated 1 August 2024 (as amended dated 8 October 2025).
  - Respondent's Answer to the Rule 12 Statement dated 2 October 2024.
  - Applicant's Reply to the Respondent's Answer dated 15 October 2024.
  - Applicant's Opening Note dated 21 October 2025
  - Respondent's Closing Submissions (including Abuse of Process application)
  - Applicant's Response to the Respondent's Abuse of Process application/s dated 16 December 2025.
  - Medical evidence filed on behalf of the Respondent.
  - Medical evidence filed by the Applicant.
  - Applicant's (updated) Statement of Costs dated 16 February 2026.
  - Respondent's Statement of Costs dated February 2026.

### **Case Management and Applications determined prior to the substantive hearing**

#### **11. *Application for disclosure of WhatsApp messages***

- 11.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding this application can be viewed [here](#).

#### **12. *Witness Anonymity***

- 12.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding this application can be viewed [here](#).

#### **13. *Special Measures***

- 13.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding this application can be viewed [here](#).

#### **14. *Amendments to the Rule 12 Statement***

- 14.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding this application can be viewed [here](#).

### **Preliminary Applications arising at the outset of the substantive hearing**

15. ***Application to adduce witness statements submitted by Colleague D and I***

15.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding this application can be viewed [here](#).

16. ***Respondent's application to set aside special measures directed by the Tribunal in relation to Colleague A's evidence.***

16.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding this application can be viewed [here](#).

**Background**

17. The Respondent was admitted to the Roll on 15 January 2013. At the time of the misconduct, he was one of the partners in the Firm, based in the Firm's office in London, where he practised in litigation.
18. On 7 February 2022, a self-report from the Respondent was made via his then legal representatives, Kingsley Napley LLP. This report set out that the Firm had begun an investigation into alleged conduct by the Respondent and statements had been taken from staff. The Respondent resigned and left the Firm on 28 February 2022.
19. The SRA received a report from Colleague J, the managing partner of the Firm on 28 February 2022. This report followed an internal investigation conducted by the Firm concerning allegations that the Respondent had made antisemitic comments in the workplace in March 2021 and behaved inappropriately either at, or following, two work social events. One event was the 'summer party' for staff, in fact on 15 October 2021, and the other event was the Christmas party for the staff of the Firm on 10 December 2021.
20. Following receipt of the report on behalf of the Respondent on 7 February 2022 and a report from the Firm on 28 February 2022, the SRA gathered evidence and took statements from the key witnesses identified in the course of its investigation.
21. On 24 October 2023, the Respondent was sent a Referral Notice. On 26 January 2024, the Respondent responded to the Referral Notice. On 15 April 2024, an Authorised Decision Maker of the SRA decided to refer the conduct of the Respondent to the Tribunal.

*First Incident*

22. The allegations against the Respondent arose from three separate incidents, the first of which occurred in or around March 2021. Colleague A recalled that the Respondent was working with her on a case. Their client worked for a Jewish security charity, providing security for Jewish charity events.
23. Colleague A recalled that the Respondent said that antisemitism "*does not exist*" and that public funds were wasted on protecting synagogues that are never attacked. It was Colleague A's evidence that the Respondent said words to the effect that Jewish people '*don't suffer from antisemitism and only have security outside of synagogues because they have lots of money and can pay for security and police*'.

24. The Respondent denied this allegation<sup>1</sup> and stated that he was in the office with Colleague A one day in March 2021 and they discussed a case regarding a Jewish community centre. The Respondent described that he had to go through multiple security checks that he felt were excessive. The Respondent recalled Colleague A explaining why such checks would be needed, given attacks on Jewish people. The Respondent was not aware of this and that was the end of the conversation as he recalled it. The Respondent stated that he later did some research on the topic and found videos of children being attacked. He apologised to Colleague A for previously saying security at the community centre was excessive.
25. It was submitted on behalf of the Respondent that that the Tribunal should approach with caution when assessing the reliability of Colleague A's evidence. [REDACTED]
26. In the Respondent's view Colleague A was someone who would ordinarily report matters openly and who would share events with others, particularly friends. It was therefore submitted that this was inconsistent with the suggestion that she had experienced multiple serious incidents but had kept them to herself for a prolonged period before raising them. It was also noted that Colleague A had previously reported misconduct in another workplace, resulting in disciplinary action against a colleague, which was said to demonstrate that she was willing and able to report serious wrongdoing.
27. The Respondent submitted that Colleague A described herself as highly attuned to antisemitism and the Tribunal was invited to consider whether such sensitivity might increase the risk of interpreting ambiguous remarks as discriminatory. In that context, it was submitted that although the applicable test was the balance of probabilities the seriousness of the allegations required cogent evidence before the Tribunal could properly conclude that the conduct occurred.
28. The Respondent pointed to the lack of contemporaneous evidence to support the allegation. No colleagues separately confirmed that the incident had taken place and no emails or messages created at the time referred to this alleged comment said to have been directed towards Colleague A.
29. The Respondent also relied on Colleague A's conduct following the alleged incident. Colleague A continued to socialise with the Respondent, invited him to group drinks and expressed a desire to work with him. Colleague A accepted that she had personal conversations with the Respondent after the alleged incident. The Respondent submitted that this behaviour was inconsistent with the suggestion that she believed he had behaved in an antisemitic manner.
30. The Respondent relied on character evidence. It was submitted that he had never previously been accused of racism or antisemitic during his career, despite attending numerous professional and social events. A number of character references were provided, including from individuals who were Jewish, all of whom stated that they had never witnessed any antisemitic conduct by the Respondent.

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<sup>1</sup> Allegation 1.1.1

*Second Incident*

31. The second incident occurred at a Firm social event on 15 October 2021. The event involved food and drinks and was paid for by the Firm. Later in the evening after the Firm event concluded, several colleagues including the Respondent attended a pub together.
32. Colleague B recalled that the Respondent did not seem too drunk on arrival at the pub but that he wanted to drink a lot. He bought shots and waited for others to arrive. There followed a discussion about race. Colleague A recalled the Respondent started saying “*Nigger*” repeatedly and “*fuck you spoon*” loudly and so others could hear, once a black colleague, Colleague I, had left the pub. Colleague A stated the Respondent used those words to describe an opponent he was fighting in a charity boxing match and that he described him as a “*tall, large, nigger*”.
33. Person G was the partner of Colleague A and he later joined the group at the pub. It was alleged that he also witnessed racist and aggressive behaviour by the Respondent. Person G recalled that the Respondent was noticeably drunk when he arrived, being loud and slurring his words Person G stated that he heard the Respondent referring to an individual he was due to fight in a charity boxing match as a “*nigger*” at least 3 times.
34. The Respondent denied these allegations<sup>2</sup> stating that he would never use the words alleged. He submitted that Colleague A had told him that he had upset Colleague I and had behaved in a racist manner towards her. The Respondent’s account was said to be broadly consistent with Colleague A’s statement in which she reported raising the issue with him. However, the Respondent denied that he had behaved in a racist manner and stated that he had subsequently discussed the matter with Colleague I, who confirmed that she had not been upset and did not consider the exchange to have been racist. He maintained that what had occurred was a robust discussion between two adults and that, although such a debate may have been unwise in the context of a social event where alcohol had been consumed, it was neither intended nor understood by the participants to be racist.
35. The Respondent further submitted that the allegation that he had used the phrase “*tall, large nigger*” was not credible, as this phrase did not appear in Colleague A’s initial report to the Firm regarding his conduct. There were no contemporaneous text messages or Group Chat messages referring to the alleged incident. The Respondent noted that the allegation only emerged later when Colleague A provided her statement during the Applicant’s subsequent investigation, and it was submitted that the late introduction of this allegation undermined its reliability.
36. The Respondent also relied on the absence of supporting evidence from other witnesses. Colleague A had suggested that the Respondent spoke loudly and that a number of people nearby would have heard the remark. However, the Respondent submitted that none of the colleagues present at the table reported hearing such a statement.

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<sup>2</sup> Allegation 1.1.2 & 1.1.3

37. The Respondent further challenged the evidence of Person G, who was Colleague A's fiancé and the only witness who suggested that he had heard racist remarks. The Respondent submitted that Person G's evidence was unreliable and inconsistent within the available timeline. Person G was only in attendance for a short period towards the end of the evening and it was advanced that the sequence of events described by Person G could not plausibly have occurred within the limited time available. The Respondent submitted that Person G's evidence was affected by his personal relationship with Colleague A and that he may have been influenced by her account of events.
38. The Respondent again cited Colleague A's conduct following the event, noting that she continued to attend social events with him and sought to work more closely with him. It was submitted that this behaviour was inconsistent with the suggestion that he had made the alleged racist remarks.
39. The Respondent referred to character evidence submitted on his behalf, stating that he had never previously been accused of racism and references from a number of individuals, including several who were black, confirmed that they had never known him to behave in a racist manner. In light of these matters, the Respondent submitted that there was insufficient evidence to establish, on the balance of probabilities, that the alleged statements had been made.
40. At the end of the evening, Person G recalled that the Respondent was incredibly drunk, had urinated on his clothes and could not get off the floor. The taxi driver did not want to take him home. Person G stated that the comments made by the Respondent made him feel very uncomfortable and he was shocked that a lawyer, let alone a partner in a firm would behave like that in public and with junior colleagues.
41. It was alleged<sup>3</sup> that during the course of that evening the Respondent made an antisemitic comment to Colleague A using words to the effect of "*racism to Jews doesn't exist, antisemitism doesn't exist, you're all on top*".
42. The Respondent denied that he said this or words to this effect. Mr Phillips KC submitted that Colleague A's account lacked credibility due to inconsistencies and the absence of supporting evidence. He emphasised that no other individuals present heard the alleged remark, that it was not reported at the time or in contemporaneous accounts and it was omitted from Colleague A's earlier witness statement but raised much later during the Applicant's investigation. The Respondent again relied on Colleague A's continued amicable conduct towards him, including ongoing work and informal communications, as being inconsistent with her allegations. It was also noted by Mr Phillips KC that the Group Chat messages contained no reference to any alleged antisemitic comment, and the Tribunal was invited to infer that such an omission undermined the reliability of Colleague A's account.
43. Colleague C recalled that the Respondent wished to continue the evening and purchased shots for the group. He also recalled that a conversation about race took place during the evening. Colleague C stated that the Respondent spoke to him about a junior colleague, Colleague D, to whom he was close. The Respondent asked

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<sup>3</sup> Allegation 1.1.4

whether there was anything going on between them and commented that Colleague D was “*the best one here*”<sup>4</sup>. Colleague C reported that he felt annoyed by these comments and hoped that no one else could hear them, as he considered them inappropriate. He did not challenge the Respondent at the time but instead changed the subject. The Applicant alleged that this remark constituted an inappropriate and unwanted sexual comment.

44. Colleague C stated that he left the pub at around 11:30 pm. By this point, he described the Respondent as being drunk, boisterous, and louder than usual. Later the following week, Colleague C recalled that the Respondent spoke to him in the office saying he did not recall much from the night at the pub, that he had injured his foot on the night and had generally drunk too much.
45. The Respondent submitted that he and Colleague C were on friendly terms and had both consumed a significant amount of alcohol at the event on 15 October 2021. He accepted that he had made a comment to the effect that Colleague D was “*the best one there*”. The Respondent clarified his comment was made in terms of Colleague D being best suited for Colleague C entering into a relationship with. The Respondent maintained that he was not referring to Colleague D’s physical appearance when he made this comment.
46. The Respondent accepted that he spoke to Colleague C about his relationship with Colleague D and asked whether they were romantically involved, stating that Colleague C was coy in response. He further accepted that he had asked whether they had slept together and explained that he regarded Colleague C as a friend. From the Respondent’s perspective, the conversation was conducted in confidence and amounted to no more than a discussion between friends.
47. The Respondent submitted that Colleague C did not take offence at the time and subsequently went on to marry Colleague D. The Respondent accepted that the remark was clumsy and acknowledged, with hindsight, that he would not have initiated such a conversation had he appreciated that offence might be caused. However, on behalf of the Respondent it was contended that the comment was not demeaning in nature, did not amount to misconduct, and did not breach the SRA’s guidance on sexual misconduct. Accordingly, Mr Phillips KC submitted that, in those circumstances, the allegation ought not to have been pursued by the Applicant.
48. It was further alleged<sup>5</sup> by the Applicant that, after Colleague C had left the pub, the Respondent said to Colleague A that he had earlier told Colleague C words to the effect of, “*what are you waiting for, you just need to bend her over,*” or “*just bend her over and fuck her,*” referring to Colleague D.
49. The Respondent denied stating that Colleague C should bend Colleague D over a table but admitted that he had said they should sleep together. The Respondent did not recall saying the words set out in Allegation 1.2.2 and stated that he would be surprised if he had done so.

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<sup>4</sup> Allegation 1.2.1

<sup>5</sup> Allegation 1.2.2

50. He stated that he was intoxicated at the time and saw the discussion with Colleague C as being nothing more than a harmless chat amongst friends, submitting that no harm was intended. The Respondent acknowledged on reflection that he should not have had such a discussion.
51. Mr Phillips KC submitted that this allegation was unfounded and unsupported by the evidence. He noted that Colleague A accepted she had not directly heard the Respondent say the alleged words to Colleague C. Her evidence was that the Respondent told her that he had made the remark earlier in the evening to Colleague C; she initially did not believe him but asserted that, following a subsequent conversation with Colleague C, he confirmed that the Respondent had made the lewd suggestion in the terms alleged.
52. Mr Phillips KC further submitted that this claimed confirmation by Colleague C was not supported by any corroborating evidence. He pointed out that Colleague C made no reference to the alleged remark in any contemporaneous note or in any of his witness statements and did not give evidence that he had heard it. Mr Phillips KC emphasised first that no other colleagues present at the table corroborated this allegation and secondly that Colleague C did not report the alleged remark at the time, whether to colleagues, friends, or by way of messages, including WhatsApp communications disclosed from the relevant period.

### *Third Incident*

53. The third incident occurred at a Firm Christmas social event on 10 December 2021 where it was alleged that the Respondent informed Colleague A that *“you Jewish people think you’re better than everyone else”*<sup>6</sup> and stated to her that *“you only got your job because you are Jewish”*<sup>7</sup>.
54. Colleague C recalled the Respondent stating that Colleague A *“only got her job because she was Jewish”* and understood this to be a reference to Colleague A working for Colleague J as they were both Jewish.
55. It was alleged by the Applicant that these comments contained reference to common antisemitic tropes, depicting power of Jews as collective, selecting Colleague A for her job as she was Jewish, and denying the existence of antisemitic. Colleague A considered these comments to be antisemitic as a Jewish person. Colleague A understood the Respondent to mean that Jewish people control everything, which is a wide stereotype.
56. The Respondent denied this allegation; he did not understand the premise of this allegation as he was employed by the Firm on a substantial salary and is not Jewish. The Respondent recalled a conversation with Colleague A about her father assisting in or arranging her getting the role at the Firm, however he denied stating to Colleague A that she *“only got her job because she was Jewish”* or words to that effect.
57. In addressing Colleague C’s evidence that he had overheard the Respondent make the alleged antisemitic comment to Colleague A on 10 December 2021, Mr Philips KC

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<sup>6</sup> Allegation 1.1.6

<sup>7</sup> Allegation 1.1.5

relied upon a subsequent WhatsApp exchange between Colleague A and Colleague C. In that exchange, Colleague A referred to the Respondent as antisemitic. Colleague C's response conveyed clear surprise at the suggestion.

58. Mr Philips KC submitted that this reaction was inconsistent with Colleague C having heard the Respondent make an overtly antisemitic remark to Colleague A only a short time earlier. It was argued that, had Colleague C in fact witnessed such a comment, he would not have been surprised by Colleague A's accusation. This inconsistency, it was submitted, materially undermined the reliability of Colleague C's recollection and his evidence that he had heard the Respondent make the statement alleged by the Applicant.
59. The Respondent also denied the allegation that he said "*you Jewish people think you're better than everyone else*" which he stated was not something he would say as it was not in his character to make such statements. Mr Philips KC pointed to the lack of corroborating evidence from others present at the time the comment was alleged to have been made. Most notably Colleague C who did not report hearing this comment. Furthermore, it was submitted that the allegation was not raised by Colleague A in the immediate aftermath of the events in question, including during a period when she was in the company of Colleagues C and D. In those circumstances, it was contended that the allegation was unsupported by the evidence and did not occur.
60. Colleague B stated that she observed Colleague J place a drink on the table for her and after he had gone the Respondent asked, "*did you see Colleague J's big Jew hands*"<sup>8</sup>. There was music playing but Colleague B was clear in that she could hear what the Respondent had said because he said it close to her ear and she then turned away. No one else was part of the conversation. Colleague B was aware that Colleague J was Jewish.
61. Colleague B stated that she told Colleague A what had been said when they went outside the venue for a cigarette. Colleague A told Colleague B that the comment was inappropriate and that she was offended by what the Respondent had said about Colleague J.
62. Colleague A confirmed that Colleague B informed her about a comment made by the Respondent regarding Colleague J's hands. She stated that she felt a small sense of relief, as she believed the Respondent must dislike all Jewish people and not just her. However, she remained offended by the comment.
63. Colleague A also noted the Respondent's use of the term '*Jew*' rather than Jewish, stating that she considered the former to be an aggressive and derogatory term. Colleague A believed that the Respondent had mocked her religion by referring to anti-Semitic depictions of Jewish people's physical characteristics, which she found offensive.
64. The Respondent denied making the comment as alleged. He recalled saying something along the lines of "*Colleague J has big hands*", which was intended as a reference to Colleague J's generosity, as he was grateful for the increased earnings he had received.

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<sup>8</sup> Allegation 1.1.7

The Respondent recalled having a conversation with Colleague J at the Christmas party on 10 December 2021 in which he said to him that he was very generous, and the Respondent expressed his gratitude as his higher earnings had made a difference for his family. The Respondent stated that he expressed to multiple colleagues at the Firm that he considered Colleague J to be a generous person and someone who he enjoyed working for.

65. The Respondent recalled that the Christmas party venue was extremely loud, such that Colleague B may have misheard or misunderstood the remark. This was said to be supported by Colleague B's own evidence that music was playing in the club. In addition, numerous WhatsApp messages exchanged between colleagues around the time of the event made no reference whatsoever to the alleged comment.
66. Mr Phillips KC noted that Colleague B stated she did not feel offended at the time and only later formed a different view after discussing the matter with Colleague A. Colleague B also accepted that she did not report the matter contemporaneously and only raised it subsequently with the SRA.
67. The Applicant further alleged that the Respondent made an inappropriate, unwanted, and/or sexual comment to Colleague A at the bar after the Firm Christmas party on 10 December 2021. Colleague A stated that the Respondent said to her words to the effect of "*you want me*"<sup>9</sup>. Colleague A was annoyed by this and reported feeling degraded and given his earlier antisemitic comments, she wanted to avoid the Respondent. Colleague A stated that she adjusted her clothing by pulling up her top as the Respondent made her feel uncomfortable.
68. The allegation was denied by the Respondent, who maintained that he did not make the alleged comment to Colleague A and that it was not a phrase or language he would ever use. The Respondent recalled a conversation with Colleague A in which they were joking that she wanted to be him on account of the work he was undertaking. He further stated that the music in the venue was deafeningly loud and considered that part of their conversation may have been misconstrued by Colleague A.
69. Mr Phillips KC referred to a contemporaneous WhatsApp message in which Colleague B reported to Colleague A that the Respondent had whispered to Colleague F words to the effect of "*you want me.*" At that time, Colleague A responded by describing the remark as "*disgusting.*" However, in her subsequent witness statement dated 14 December 2022, Colleague A asserted that the same remark had in fact been made to her. Mr Phillips KC submitted that this inconsistency was significant. If the remark had genuinely been made to both Colleague F and Colleague A, it was submitted that Colleague A would have said so in the contemporaneous WhatsApp exchange, rather than merely reacting to what had allegedly been said to another. It was contended that the allegation had evolved over time, such that a comment originally attributed to an interaction with Colleague F had later been adopted by Colleague A as part of her own account.
70. Mr Phillips KC further noted that Colleague A did not report the alleged comment to Colleagues B or C following the event, nor to anyone else at the time. The alleged

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<sup>9</sup> Allegation 1.2.4

comment was also absent from Colleague A's initial statement to the Firm. In those circumstances, it was submitted that the only evidence in support of the allegation was Colleague A's later account, which was inconsistent with the contemporaneous material and was therefore insufficient to discharge the burden of proof.

71. Finally, there were two allegations that the Respondent touched colleagues in an inappropriate, unwanted, and/or sexual manner at the Firm Christmas party on 10 December 2021.
72. The first of these allegations related to conduct at the bar after the Firm Christmas party when it was said that the Respondent touched Colleague F's bottom<sup>10</sup>. Colleague F stated that during the evening the Respondent was slurring his words and his eyes did not look open. Later the Respondent reached down and pinched her bottom. There was no one else near enough to her to have done this. Colleague F stated that she was utterly shocked as it came out of nowhere. She went upstairs with Colleague H and told him what had happened. Then she left the bar. Subsequently when she became aware that the Respondent had allegedly been inappropriate with other colleagues, she reported her experience to them.
73. The Respondent denied this allegation. He did not recall touching Colleague F's bottom and stated that he would find it genuinely surprising that he would have done so as that is not in any way within his character. The Respondent recalled speaking with Colleague F at the bar during the event, and she commented that she would like to work more with the Respondent as she enjoys the type of litigation work that he did and she considered him a really good lawyer.
74. The Respondent cited his poor hearing, particularly in loud environments such as a bar, and so he was leaning in to hear her during their exchange. In doing so, the Respondent accepted that his hand may have been resting on her lower back or waist area, not her bottom. The Respondent maintained that this was in no way sexual and there was no intention to cause any unwanted touching.
75. The Respondent stated that if this touching did occur it may have been attributable to another individual in the crowded bar environment. The Respondent's evidence was that Colleague F was heavily intoxicated and behaving in a flirtatious manner. The Respondent recalled that Colleague F was slurring her words and was later asked to leave the club due to her level of intoxication.
76. Mr Philips KC submitted that the Respondent's position was a clear denial of any deliberate or sexually motivated touching. The Respondent accepted only the possibility of incidental contact in a crowded environment. The burden of proof remained on the Applicant and that it could not, on the balance of probabilities, exclude an innocent explanation, such as accidental contact in a busy bar or a genuine misattribution of what had occurred by Colleague F arising from her intoxication. In those circumstances, it was contended that the allegation was not made out.

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<sup>10</sup> Allegation 1.3.2

77. The second of these allegations was that the Respondent slapped Colleague B on the thigh and pinched her bottom<sup>11</sup>. Colleague B stated that Colleague D had knocked into their table causing the drinks on it to spill. Whilst she was patting herself dry, Colleague B stated that the Respondent used his left hand to slap her inner thigh quite hard. Colleague B stated that it was not accidental as the Respondent had to move his hand from his side to deliberately slap her thigh area. Colleague B stated that the force made her jolt and that it was an odd thing to do as he made contact at the top of her inner thigh, close to her crotch area. Colleague B stated that she did not feel comfortable with the Respondent, who did not seem very drunk at this point, and she therefore removed herself from that vicinity.
78. The Respondent denied this allegation. Mr Phillips KC submitted that the Respondent admitted patting Colleague B's thigh nearer to her knee but explained that this occurred in the context of Colleague B patting herself down after a drink had been spilled on her. Colleague B had confirmed that she did not consider the contact to be sexual, and the Respondent's evidence was said to be consistent with that position.
79. A short time later Colleague B stated that she was dancing with others, the Respondent seemed more drunk by this point of the evening and suddenly he pinched her bum, she turned around and he was the only one close enough to have done it. Colleague B stated that there was plenty of space where she had been dancing had the Respondent wished to walk past her without physical contact. Colleague B stated that the Respondent used his left hand to pinch her bottom, it was quick as she moved away from him. Colleague B gave the Respondent a look to indicate that she was not happy with him and stated that she was shocked by what he had done. Colleague B reported what had happened and a senior colleague reassured her that the Respondent would be sent home.
80. The Respondent had no recollection of pinching Colleague B, or anyone's, bottom on the evening in question. The Respondent stated that he had a good friendship with Colleague B. The Respondent denied touching Colleague B's bottom but accepted that he had been dancing with her.
81. Mr Phillips KC also relied upon evidence suggesting that Colleague A had actively encouraged Colleague B to report the incident. It was submitted that Colleague B had not originally intended to report the matter and only did so after being prompted by Colleague A. In support of this contention, reference was made to contemporaneous WhatsApp messages in which Colleague A was said to have urged Colleague B to raise the issue at a forthcoming meeting with the partners.
82. Mr Phillips KC further submitted that Colleague B's oral evidence was determinative of the question whether any alleged physical contact was sexual in nature. When asked directly whether she considered the contact to be sexual, Colleague B had replied that it was not. Accordingly, it was argued that even if the Tribunal were to find that some physical contact had occurred (the Respondent denying any pinching), the Applicant could not establish, on the evidence of its own principal witness, that any such contact was sexual.

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<sup>11</sup> Allegation 1.3.3

83. **Application to stay the proceedings as an abuse of process.**

83.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding this application can be viewed [here](#).

**Consequential Applications**

84. Following the Tribunal's dismissal of the Respondent's application for a stay on the ground of abuse of process the Respondent made three further consequential applications:

85. *Application to suspend the filing of the Tribunal's decision*

85.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding this application can be viewed [here](#).

86. *Application for the production of the Tribunal's full written reasons; and*

*an application for an interim stay of the proceedings to enable the Respondent to pursue an application to the High Court regarding the Tribunal's refusal of the abuse of process application.*

86.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding these applications can be viewed [here](#).

**Witnesses**

87. The evidence is quoted or summarised in the Findings of Fact and Law below. The evidence referred to will be that which was relevant to the findings of the Tribunal, and to facts or issues in dispute between the parties. For the avoidance of doubt, the Tribunal read all of the documents in the case. The absence of any reference to particular evidence should not be taken as an indication that the Tribunal did not read, hear or consider that evidence.

88. The following witnesses provided witness statements and gave oral evidence during the hearing: -

- Colleague F
- Colleague H
- Colleague A
- Colleague B
- Person G
- Colleague C
- Colleague J
- Dr J. Garabette
- Dr A.J. Wilkins
- The Respondent

**The Applicant's Case**

89. The Rule 12 Statement – [\[Click Here\]](#)

## The Respondent's Case

90. The Respondent's Answer to the Applicant's Rule 12 Statement – [\[Click Here\]](#)

## Findings of Fact and Law

91. The Applicant was required by Rule 5 of The Solicitors (Disciplinary Proceedings) Rules 2019 to prove the allegations to the standard applicable in civil proceedings (on the balance of probabilities). The Tribunal had due regard to its statutory duty, under section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998, to act in a manner which was compatible with the Respondent's rights to a fair trial and to respect for their private and family life under Articles 6 and 8 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.
92. The Tribunal reviewed all the material before it and considered with great care the oral evidence (and cross-examination) of the witnesses, along with the submissions made by Mr Counsell KC and Mr Phillips KC. All findings were made on the balance of probabilities. The burden of proof lay entirely with the Applicant.
93. The Tribunal was satisfied that there was a clear nexus to practice. The Respondent made offensive, inappropriate, and discriminatory comments to, or in the presence of, colleagues, including comments concerning Colleague A, D and J. The conduct occurred in a workplace context, including at Firm social events and in their immediate aftermath, and was therefore sufficiently connected to the Respondent's professional practice.
94. The Tribunal noted the Group Chat messages referred to in the interlocutory applications and in the witnesses' oral evidence. The messages related primarily to matters of witness consistency and context rather than the substantive allegations of misconduct that were, on the Applicant's case, sustained by direct evidence.
95. In reaching its findings of fact, the Tribunal considered those messages to be of limited relevance to the issues in dispute and of little assistance in determining the allegations. Accordingly, it placed minimal weight upon them.
96. **1.1 - He made comments that were offensive, inappropriate, and/or discriminatory, in that:**
- 1.1.1 - In or around March 2021, he said to Colleague A words to the effect that Jewish people 'don't suffer from antisemitism and only have security outside of synagogues because they have lots of money and can pay for security and police,'**
- 96.1 The alleged conduct was said to have occurred during a conversation between the Respondent and Colleague A while they were working together on a case. The client in question was employed by a Jewish security charity responsible for providing security at Jewish charitable events. The Respondent was aware that Colleague A was Jewish, this being an important aspect of her identity.
- 96.2 Against that background, it was alleged by Colleague A that the Respondent expressed views about Jewish people, including that they did not suffer from antisemitism due to

their financial means, which he suggested enabled them to secure protection through private security and the police. It was common ground that the conversation had taken place and that no other individuals were present.

- 96.3 To the extent that it was suggested that caution should be exercised when assessing the reliability of Colleague A's evidence on account of her medical circumstances, the Tribunal rejected that submission. The Tribunal found no proper basis upon which the weight to be attached to Colleague A's recollection should be reduced.
- 96.4 Colleague A gave a clear and consistent account of the material conversation, and the Tribunal found her evidence to be credible and reliable. Where differing accounts of the conversation were provided by the Respondent and Colleague A, the Tribunal preferred the evidence of Colleague A where it conflicted with that of the Respondent. Insofar as she was criticised for failing to report the Respondent's comment immediately, the Tribunal accepted her explanation that she regarded it at the time as an isolated remark. It followed that in light of subsequent events, Colleague A later included what she regarded as a troubling and offensive comment within her broader complaint to the Firm concerning the Respondent's conduct.
- 96.5 The Tribunal rejected the submission that any purported oversensitivity on the part of Colleague A to antisemitism increased the risk of her interpreting ambiguous remarks as discriminatory.
- 96.6 The Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that in or around March 2021, the Respondent made comments that were offensive, inappropriate and discriminatory in that he stated to Colleague A words to the effect that Jewish people '*don't suffer from antisemitism and only have security outside of synagogues because they have lots of money and can pay for security and police*'. Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.1.1 proved, the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code.
- 96.7 In stating to Colleague A words to the effect that Jewish people '*don't suffer from antisemitism and only have security outside of synagogues because they have lots of money and can pay for security and police*' the Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Rule 1.1 of the SRA Code of Conduct which required that the Respondent did not unfairly discriminate by allowing his personal views to affect his professional relationships and the way in which he provided services.
- 96.8 The Tribunal also found that the Respondent breached Rule 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct which required the Respondent to treat colleagues fairly and with respect and prohibited bullying, harassment and discrimination and Principle 2 of the 2019 Principles which required the Respondent to act in a way that upheld public trust and confidence in the solicitors' profession and in legal services provided by authorised persons.
- 96.9 Principle 5 of the 2019 Principles required that the Respondent act with integrity. The Tribunal was assisted by the comments of Jackson LJ in *Wingate v SRA* [2018] EWCA Civ 366, where he stated:

“[97] ... the term “integrity” is a useful shorthand to express the higher standards which society expects from professional persons and which the professions expect from their own members ... The underlying rationale is that the professions have a privileged and trusted role in society. In return they are required to live up to their own professional standards ... [100] Integrity connotes adherence to the ethical standards of one’s own profession. That involves more than mere honesty”.

- 96.10 In making the material comment to Colleague A the Tribunal found that the Respondent failed to demonstrate the higher standards which society expects from professional persons and which the profession expects from its own members. The Tribunal further found that the Respondent failed to adhere to ethical standards of the profession and had therefore breached Principle 5 of the 2019 Principles.
- 96.11 Principle 6 of the 2019 Principles required the Respondent to act in a way that encouraged equality, diversity, and inclusion. The Tribunal found that in making the material comment to Colleague A the Respondent had breached Principle 6 of the 2019 Principles.
97. **1.1.2 - On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he referred to an individual in a boxing match using words to the effect of ‘tall, large nigger’,**
- 1.1.3 - On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he repeatedly used the term ‘nigger’**
- 97.1 The material comments were alleged to have been made by the Respondent at a Firm social event on 15 October 2021. The evidence indicated that the Respondent appeared mildly intoxicated during the early part of the evening, but that his level of intoxication increased progressively, such that by the end of the evening he was highly intoxicated.
- 97.2 The conduct took place at a busy and noisy social setting, it was unsurprising that not all those present heard the full extent of the Respondent’s comments, many of whom were engaged in other conversations at the time.
- 97.3 Colleague J recalled that the Respondent had previously described his participation in a forthcoming charity boxing match in an emotive and animated manner.
- 97.4 Colleague A gave a clear and consistent account of the Respondent’s behaviour and the comments made by him when describing his opponent in a forthcoming charity boxing match as a “tall, large, nigger”. Person G joined the Respondent and his colleagues later in the evening and provided a detailed account of his time in the Respondent’s company. Person G described the comments made by the Respondent which included him referring to an individual he was due to fight in a charity boxing match as a “nigger” on at least 3 occasions. The Tribunal found the accounts of Colleague J, A and Person G to be credible and reliable.
- 97.5 The Tribunal found that the Respondent was intoxicated at the time he made the material comments and his level of intoxication adversely affected the reliability of his recollection and his evidence.

- 97.6 The Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that at a Firm party on 15 October 2021 the Respondent made comments that were offensive, inappropriate and discriminatory in that he referred to an individual in a boxing match using words to the effect of *'tall, large nigger'* and that he repeatedly used the term *'nigger'*.
- 97.7 Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.1.2 and 1.1.3 proved, the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code. In stating *'tall, large nigger'* and by repeatedly using the term *'nigger'* the Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Rules 1.1 and 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct and each of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.
98. **1.1.4 - On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he said to Colleague A words to the effect of *'racism to Jews doesn't exist, antisemitism doesn't exist, you're all on top'*,**
- 98.1 This allegation also arose following discussions between the Respondent and colleagues at the Firm social event on 15 October 2021. Colleague A provided a detailed account of the context in which the alleged comment was made to her by the Respondent, arising from an earlier, separate conversation between the Respondent and colleagues regarding racism and its impact on people of various ethnicities.
- 98.2 The Tribunal placed limited weight on the Respondent's submission that Colleague A's continued amicable conduct towards him, including ongoing work-related and informal communications following the Firm's social event on 15 October 2021, undermined her complaint and was inconsistent with her allegation. The Tribunal found that the continued contact between the Respondent and Colleague A was entirely consistent with a junior employee interacting professionally with a more senior colleague in the course of her role and career development. Colleague A had, furthermore, cooperated with the Firm's investigation and subsequently with the Applicant in a professional and candid manner.
- 98.3 The Tribunal found on the balance of probabilities that the conversation developed as described by Colleague A. During it, the Respondent commented that *'racism to Jews doesn't exist, antisemitism doesn't exist, you're all on top'*. The Respondent's remark was made as part of a broader discussion in which he shared his views on the impact of racism across different ethnic groups, including white working-class people.
- 98.4 Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.1.4 proved, the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code. In stating that *'racism to Jews doesn't exist, antisemitism doesn't exist, you're all on top'* the Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Rules 1.1 and 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct and each of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.
99. **1.1.5 - On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he said to Colleague A words to the effect of *'you only got your job because you are Jewish'***
- 1.1.6 - On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he said to Colleague A words to the effect of *'you Jewish people think you're better than everyone else'*,**
- 99.1 This allegation arose following conversations between the Respondent and colleagues at the Firm social event on 10 December 2021. It was common ground between

Colleague A and the Respondent that a discussion took place between them regarding how Colleague A had come to work for the Firm.

- 99.2 Colleague A provided detailed context as to how the alleged comment came to be made and gave a clear and consistent account of the conversation, stating that the Respondent said, *'you only got your job because you are Jewish'*. The Tribunal found her evidence to be credible and reliable.
- 99.3 Colleague C was present during the conversation and corroborated Colleague A's account, stating that he also heard the Respondent make that comment to her.
- 99.4 The Respondent maintained that Colleague A had misinterpreted the conversation. He accepted that he had drawn a link between Colleague A securing her role with the Firm and her father's relationship with Colleague J (following Colleague A having made that clear) but denied that he had suggested or insinuated that her religion played any part in her recruitment.
- 99.5 The Tribunal was also referred to messages in the Group Chat, including messages sent by Colleague C; however, these were of limited evidential value, Colleague C had given oral evidence and was cross-examined on the underlying facts.
- 99.6 Where there was a conflict in the evidence, the Tribunal preferred the evidence of Colleague A and Colleague C to that of the Respondent. The Tribunal found, on the balance of probabilities, that the Respondent stated to Colleague A, *'you only got your job because you are Jewish'*, during their conversation about how she had come to work for the Firm.
- 99.7 Colleague A also reported that during that same conversation the Respondent also stated, *"you Jewish people think you're better than everyone else"*. The Tribunal's earlier findings regarding the reliability and credibility of Colleague A's account applied. This comment was made by the Respondent in the course of a wider conversation in which he made several references to Jewish people individually and as a collective. The context was determinative and helpful in the Tribunal's finding.
- 99.8 The Tribunal preferred the evidence of Colleague A to that of the Respondent. The Tribunal found, on the balance of probabilities, that the Respondent stated to Colleague A, *"you Jewish people think you're better than everyone else"*.
- 99.9 Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.1.5 and 1.1.6 proved on the balance of probabilities the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code. In stating that *'you only got your job because you are Jewish'* and *"you Jewish people think you're better than everyone else"* to Colleague A, the Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Rules 1.1 and 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct and each of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.
100. **1.1.7 - On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he said to Colleague B words to the effect of *'did you see [Colleague J's] big Jew hands'*.**
- 100.1 This allegation arose from a comment allegedly made by the Respondent at the Firm social event on 10 December 2021. Colleague B gave a clear and detailed account of

the material conversation, and the Tribunal found her evidence to be credible and reliable.

- 100.2 Colleague B stated that she observed Colleague J place a drink on the table for her, and that after he had left, the Respondent asked her, ‘*did you see Colleague J’s big Jew hands?*’ There was music playing at the venue, but Colleague B was clear as to the words used by the Respondent, as he had stated them in close proximity to her ear. At the time, Colleague B considered it an inappropriate remark. On further reflection, and after speaking with a Jewish colleague, she concluded that it was an antisemitic comment.
- 100.3 The Respondent accepted that the conversation with Colleague B had taken place as described; however, he maintained that she had misunderstood or misheard the material comment. He recalled saying something along the lines of ‘*Colleague J has big hands*’, which he said was intended as a reference to Colleague J’s generosity regarding his remuneration. The Respondent ascribed Colleague B’s misunderstanding to the noise at the venue and sought to cast doubt on the reliability of her account, noting that the conduct complained of was not reflected in any of the WhatsApp messages disclosed.
- 100.4 The Tribunal rejected the Respondent’s evidence in relation to this allegation and found that the comment had been made as reported by Colleague B. The comment occurred in the context of several similar antisemitic remarks made by the Respondent to colleagues, which the Tribunal found demonstrated a propensity.
- 100.5 Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.1.7 proved on the balance of probabilities the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code. In stating ‘*did you see Colleague J’s big Jew hands?*’ to Colleague B, the Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Rules 1.1 and 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct and each of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.
101. **1.2. - He made comments that were inappropriate, unwanted and/or sexual either to, or about his colleagues:**
- 1.2.1. - On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he asked Colleague C whether he was sleeping with Colleague D, and he said to Colleague C words to the effect that Colleague D was ‘the best one here’**
- 101.1 This allegation arose following a conversation between the Respondent and Colleague C at the Firm social event on 15 October 2021.
- 101.2 Colleague C stated that, during the evening, the Respondent spoke to him about a junior colleague, Colleague D, with whom he was close. The Respondent asked whether there was anything going on between them and commented that Colleague D was ‘*the best one here*’. The facts were not disputed as the Respondent accepted that the conversation took place and that he had made that comment to Colleague C about Colleague D.
- 101.3 The Tribunal noted the context and clarification provided by the Respondent who submitted that his comment was intended to convey that Colleague D was the most suitable person for Colleague C to pursue a relationship with. He maintained that he was not referring to Colleague D’s physical appearance when making the comment.

- 101.4 The Tribunal found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.2.1 proved on the balance of probabilities and therefore went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code. The conversation between the Respondent and Colleague C took place in a social setting in which both had consumed alcohol. The Tribunal found that the Respondent exercised poor judgment in engaging a professional colleague in a conversation of that nature. However, although the comment was ill-advised, the Tribunal did not find that it reached the threshold for a breach of his regulatory obligations.
- 101.5 Accordingly, the Tribunal found that the facts proved in respect of Allegation 1.2.1 did not amount to a breach of Paragraph 1.1 or 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct or any of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.
102. **1.2.2. - On 15 October 2021, at a Firm party, he told a group of colleagues that he had told Colleague C that he should have sex with Colleague D. Specifically, the Respondent is alleged to have said that he had told Colleague C words to the effect of 'what are you waiting for you just need to bend her over' or 'just bend her over and fuck her'**
- 102.1 This allegation arose from a comment allegedly made by the Respondent at the Firm's social event on 15 October 2021.
- 102.2 The Respondent accepted that he had engaged in a conversation with Colleague C about Colleague D and that he had stated that she was *'the best one here'*. The Tribunal's findings in relation to that comment are set out above under Allegation 1.2.1.
- 102.3 This allegation concerned a later point in the evening, after Colleague C had left. Colleague A reported a conversation with the Respondent in which he told her that he had earlier said to Colleague C words to the effect of *"what are you waiting for, you just need to bend her over,"* or *"just bend her over and fuck her,"* referring to Colleague D.
- 102.4 The Respondent was intoxicated at the time of his conversation with Colleague A. He denied stating words to the effect of *"what are you waiting for, you just need to bend her over,"* or *"just bend her over and fuck her,"* but admitted that he had said to Colleague C that he should sleep with Colleague D.
- 102.5 Colleague A explained that she had not directly heard the Respondent make those remarks to Colleague C; rather, the Respondent relayed to her what he claimed to have said to Colleague C earlier in the evening. Colleague A gave a clear and detailed account of this conversation, and the Tribunal found her evidence to be credible and reliable.
- 102.6 The Tribunal found, on the balance of probabilities, that the Respondent made comments that were inappropriate, unwanted, and sexual either to, or about his colleagues in that he stated words to the effect of *"what are you waiting for, you just need to bend her over,"* or *"just bend her over and fuck her"* in relation to Colleague D.

- 102.7 Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.2.2 proved on the balance of probabilities the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code. In stating words to the effect of “*what are you waiting for, you just need to bend her over,*” or “*just bend her over and fuck her*” the Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Rules 1.1 and 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct and each of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.
103. **1.2.4. - On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he said to Colleague A words to the effect of ‘*you know you want me*’,**
- 103.1 This allegation arose from a comment allegedly made by the Respondent and directed at Colleague A at the Firm’s social event on 10 December 2021.
- 103.2 Colleague A stated that, at around 8pm to 9pm during the event, the Respondent approached her in close proximity and whispered, or otherwise spoke quietly, words to the effect of ‘*you know you want me*’. The accuracy and reliability of her account in respect of this comment was not challenged during cross-examination.
- 103.3 The Respondent denied the allegation, maintaining that it was not a phrase or language he would ever use. He provided an alternative account of his interaction with Colleague A, stating that they were joking that she wanted to be him on account of the work he was undertaking. He further suggested that the music in the venue was deafeningly loud, which may have caused that part of the conversation to have been misconstrued by Colleague A.
- 103.4 The Respondent also contended that this allegation had evolved over time, such that a comment originally attributed to an interaction between himself and Colleague F had later been adopted by Colleague A as part of her own account. However, this contention was not put to Colleague A in cross-examination.
- 103.5 Colleague A gave a clear and consistent account of the interaction, and the Tribunal found her evidence to be credible and reliable. Where the evidence of the Respondent and Colleague A differed, the Tribunal preferred the evidence of Colleague A.
- 103.6 The Tribunal found, on the balance of probabilities, that the Respondent made a comment that was inappropriate, unwanted, and sexual in that; on 10 December 2021 he stated words to the effect of ‘*you know you want me*’ to Colleague A.
- 103.7 Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.2.4 proved on the balance of probabilities the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code. In stating words to the effect of ‘*you know you want me*’ to Colleague A, the Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Rules 1.1 and 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct and each of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.
104. **1.3. - He touched several of his colleagues in an inappropriate, unwanted, and/or sexual manner:**
- 1.3.2. - On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he touched Colleague F's bottom, and/or**

- 104.1 Colleague F provided a clear and consistent account of her interaction with the Respondent at the Firm's Christmas party on 10 December 2021. She reported that, several hours into the event, after the meal had concluded and the group had moved to a bar area, the Respondent was slurring his words, and his eyes did not appear fully open.
- 104.2 Colleague F reported that she was standing near the Respondent while waiting to order a drink and speaking with him as they waited to be served. The Respondent was standing in close proximity to her, to her right side. Colleague F stated that the Respondent then reached towards her bottom and pinched it. She was clear that there was no one else sufficiently close to her who could have done this. She described the contact as a deliberate pinch, rather than an accidental touch, as it involved a distinct pinch followed by a quick release. She confirmed that the Respondent touched her over her dress.
- 104.3 Colleague F stated that she was shocked by the incident, which occurred without warning. The Tribunal found her evidence to be credible and reliable. She reported the incident to Colleague H immediately after it occurred.
- 104.4 Colleague H confirmed that Colleague F reported the incident to him shortly after it was said to have occurred. He stated that she appeared visibly taken aback. Colleague F indicated that she did not wish to remain at the event and wanted to leave. Colleague H formed the impression that she felt very uncomfortable about what had happened and he escorted her to the train station. During that journey, Colleague F expressed concern about how she would be able to work with the Respondent in the future. The Tribunal found Colleague H's evidence to be credible and reliable.
- 104.5 The Respondent denied this allegation. He did not recall touching Colleague F's bottom and stated that he would find it genuinely surprising that he would have done so as that is not in any way within his character. The Respondent accepted only the possibility of incidental contact in a crowded environment.
- 104.6 The Tribunal rejected the Respondent's contention that this conduct was accidental contact in a busy or crowded social setting or a genuine misattribution of what had occurred by Colleague F arising from her own intoxication. The Tribunal found that the Respondent was intoxicated at the time of the conduct alleged by Colleague F and this had impacted on his recollection of the evening.
- 104.7 The Tribunal preferred the evidence of Colleague F and Colleague H over that of the Respondent. The Tribunal gave weight to the consistency of evidence between Colleague F and Colleague H and found that the conduct complained of had occurred as described by Colleague F. The Tribunal accepted Colleague F's evidence that she was embarrassed by what had occurred and left soon afterwards having informed Colleague H of the incident.
- 104.8 The Tribunal found, on the balance of probabilities, that the Respondent touched Colleague F in an inappropriate, unwanted, and sexual manner in that on 10 December 2021 at the Firm's Christmas party, he touched Colleague F on her bottom.

- 104.9 Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.3.2 proved on the balance of probabilities the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code. In touching Colleague F in an inappropriate, unwanted, and sexual manner the Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Rules 1.1 and 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct and each of Principles 2, 5 and 6 of the 2019 Principles.
105. **1.3.3. - On 10 December 2021, at a Firm Christmas party, he slapped Colleague B's inner thigh and/or pinched Colleague B's bottom.**
- 105.1 Colleague B gave a clear and detailed account of the conduct referred to in this allegation. She stated that Colleague D had knocked into their table, causing drinks to spill, some of which went onto her clothing. Whilst she was patting herself dry, Colleague B stated that the Respondent used his left hand to slap her inner thigh quite hard. Although the contact was not painful, it was a deliberate act which caused her concern. She stated that the Respondent's hand remained on her inner thigh for around one second and that she was more concerned about the location of the contact than the force used, albeit she did not consider the contact to be sexual.
- 105.2 Colleague B stated that she did not feel comfortable with the Respondent, who did not appear to be very intoxicated at that stage. She therefore removed herself from the vicinity and joined other colleagues elsewhere in the venue.
- 105.3 Approximately 1.5 hours later, Colleague B stated that she was dancing with colleagues. By this stage, the Respondent was noticeably more intoxicated. She stated that he suddenly pinched her bottom. She turned around and he was the only person close enough to have done so. Colleague B stated that there was sufficient space for the Respondent to pass without making physical contact. She further stated that the Respondent used his left hand to pinch her bottom; the contact was brief as she moved away from him. Colleague B gave the Respondent a look to indicate that she was unhappy and stated that she was shocked by his conduct. She reported the incident, and a senior colleague reassured her that the Respondent would be sent home.
- 105.4 Colleague B was not challenged in cross-examination in respect of the allegation that the Respondent pinched her bottom, and the Tribunal accepted her evidence regarding this conduct. The Tribunal found her evidence to be credible and reliable.
- 105.5 The Respondent denied the allegation, stating that he had no recollection of pinching Colleague B's bottom on the evening in question. He admitted patting Colleague B's thigh, nearer to her knee, but explained that this occurred in the context of her patting herself down after a drink had been spilled. He emphasised that Colleague B did not consider the contact to be sexual.
- 105.6 The Tribunal found, on the balance of probabilities, that the Respondent touched Colleague B in an inappropriate, unwanted, and sexual manner, in that on 10 December 2021, at the Firm's Christmas party, he slapped Colleague B's inner thigh and pinched her bottom.
- 105.7 Having found the factual matrix of Allegation 1.3.3 proved on the balance of probabilities, the Tribunal went on to consider the alleged breaches of the Principles and the Code. In touching Colleague B in an inappropriate, unwanted, and sexual

manner, the Tribunal found that the Respondent breached Rule 1.5 of the SRA Code of Conduct and Principles 2, 5, and 6 of the 2019 Principles.

105.8 The Tribunal did not find that this conduct engaged Rule 1.1 of the SRA Code of Conduct, which requires a solicitor not to unfairly discriminate by allowing personal views to affect professional relationships and the provision of services.

#### 106. ***Sexual Motivation***

106.1 Allegations 1.2 and 1.3 were advanced on the basis that the Respondent's conduct was sexually motivated. This was alleged as an aggravating feature of the Respondent's conduct but was not an essential ingredient in proving those allegations.

106.2 Mr Counsell KC referred the Tribunal to *Basson v General Medical Council [2018] EWHC 505 (Admin)* ('Basson') and submitted that the only reasonable inference of the Respondent's motivation for the conduct described was that it was sexually motivated, in that it was in pursuit of the Respondent's own sexual gratification or in pursuit of a future sexual relationship.

106.3 Mr Counsell KC set out that the Applicant's case alleged that the Respondent's conduct as described at Allegations 1.2 and 1.3 was of a sexual nature and sexually motivated within the meaning of the term discussed by Foster J in *General Medical Council v Dr RH [2020] EWHC 2518 (Admin)* ('RH').

106.4 The Respondent denied that his conduct, as detailed under Allegations 1.2 and 1.3, was sexually motivated.

106.5 The Tribunal considered the proven allegations in light of the guidance contained in Basson and RH. The Tribunal made no findings in relation to sexual motivation as regards Allegation 1.2. The Tribunal found that the Respondent's conduct as alleged at Allegation 1.3.3, in relation to slapping Colleague B's inner thigh only at the Firm Christmas party on 10 December 2021, was not sexually motivated.

106.6 The Tribunal found that the Respondent's conduct as alleged at Allegation 1.3.3, in relation to pinching Colleague B's bottom at the Firm Christmas party on 10 December 2021, was sexually motivated. The Tribunal found that the Respondent's conduct as alleged at Allegation 1.3.2 in relation to touching Colleague F's bottom at the Firm Christmas party on 10 December 2021, was sexually motivated.

#### **Previous Disciplinary Matters**

107. The Respondent had no previous disciplinary findings recorded against him.

#### **Mitigation**

108. On behalf of the Respondent, Mr Phillips KC submitted that the appropriate and proportionate sanction was a short, fixed-term suspension rather than strike-off.

109. Mr Phillips KC submitted that the Tribunal should assess sanction by reference to its findings. In particular it was submitted that in the absence of full contemporaneous

- material the seriousness of the misconduct should not be should not aggravated by drawing inferences of predatory conduct, escalation, or entrenched attitudinal deficiency which had not been found.
110. The misconduct, whilst serious, was said to have occurred within a limited and defined period at social events, and did not involve clients, dishonesty, or sustained exploitation and the evidential context was therefore said to justify restraint when assessing future risk.
  111. The Tribunal was invited to apply the established approach to sanction, namely consideration of seriousness by reference to culpability and harm, the identification of aggravating and mitigating factors, the assessment of the risk of repetition, and an overall evaluation of proportionality. It was submitted that strike-off is reserved for the most serious cases, typically involving features such as predation, persistence, abuse of position, or exploitation of vulnerability, which were not present in this case.
  112. Significant weight was placed on the Respondent's previous good character. He had been admitted in 2013 and had no prior regulatory findings or complaints. It was submitted that this indicated that the misconduct was out of character and did not demonstrate an enduring risk.
  113. In support of the Respondent's character and professional conduct more broadly, a number of positive testimonials were provided and placed before the Tribunal.
  114. [REDACTED].
  115. Mr Phillips KC submitted that the medical evidence demonstrated that these factors were capable of materially impairing the Respondent's judgment and increasing disinhibition, particularly in a social setting where alcohol was present. [REDACTED]. Whilst these matters were not advanced as an excuse for the misconduct, it was submitted that they were relevant to an assessment of culpability.
  116. In addition, Mr Phillips KC submitted that the medical evidence supported the conclusion that the Respondent's condition was acute and time-limited rather than chronic or entrenched. It was said that both experts accepted that the Respondent's symptoms had improved and that, with appropriate management of alcohol consumption and coping strategies, the risk of recurrence was low. The Tribunal was therefore invited to treat the medical evidence as relevant both to reduced culpability and to a materially reduced risk of repetition.
  117. Mr Phillips KC submitted that the risk of repetition was low. Reliance was placed on the absence of further incidents since 2021, the Respondent's engagement with professional support, and evidence that he had significantly reduced his alcohol consumption. These matters were said to demonstrate developing insight and remediation.
  118. In relation to sanction, Mr Phillips KC submitted that a fixed-term suspension would adequately reflect the seriousness of the misconduct, whilst protecting the public and maintaining public confidence. It was further submitted that any suspension could appropriately be combined with proportionate and time-limited restrictions on return to

practice, including supervised employment, restrictions on managerial responsibilities, and the completion of relevant training.

119. Reference was made to comparator cases in which misconduct of a similar nature had resulted in suspension or financial penalty rather than strike-off. It was submitted that those authorities demonstrated that, where misconduct, though serious, was not of the most aggravated kind and where there was evidence of mitigation and reduced risk, a time-limited suspension was capable of meeting the regulatory objectives.
120. To support any return to practice and to demonstrate remediation the Respondent indicated that he was willing to complete targeted training on workplace boundaries, sexual harassment, and professional ethics.

### **Sanction**

121. The Tribunal considered the Guidance Note on Sanction (11th Edition February 2025). and the proper approach to sanctions as set out in *Fuglers and others v SRA* [2014] EWHC 179. The Tribunal's overriding objective when considering sanction, was the need to maintain public confidence in the integrity of the profession.
122. In determining sanction, the Tribunal's role was to assess the seriousness of the proven misconduct and to impose a sanction that was fair and proportionate in all the circumstances. In determining the seriousness of the misconduct, the Tribunal was to consider the Respondents' culpability and harm identified together with the aggravating and mitigating factors that existed.
123. In relation to the motivation for the misconduct at the Firm events on 15 October 2021 and 10 December 2021, the Tribunal found that the Respondent was disinhibited by significant alcohol consumption and that his conduct occurred in that context.
124. In considering the extent to which the misconduct arose from actions which were planned or spontaneous the Tribunal found that the Respondent ought to have taken steps, and assumed greater personal responsibility, to ensure that his conduct at the October event was not repeated at the subsequent event in December. His failure to do so was a relevant factor in assessing culpability.
125. The Respondent was an experienced solicitor and a partner at the Firm, with responsibility for managing and supervising junior members of staff. His position of seniority increased his culpability in relation to the misconduct found proved.
126. The Tribunal had regard for the extent of the harm that was intended or might reasonably have been foreseen to be caused by the Respondent's misconduct and the extent to which the Respondent was directly responsible for his actions and the circumstances giving rise to the misconduct.
127. The Tribunal was provided with expert reports and heard oral evidence from two consultant psychiatrists, Dr Garabette instructed by the Respondent and Dr Wilkins instructed by the Applicant. There was a degree of agreement between the experts that, between August 2021 and January 2022, [REDACTED]. Both experts also agreed that

alcohol intoxication played a significant role in the Respondent's behaviour at the relevant events.

128. Dr Wilkins view was that it was unlikely that [REDACTED] would, of themselves, have led to the behaviours described in the allegations. His opinion was that the most likely explanation was that the Respondent became significantly intoxicated and behaved in a disinhibited manner in the way that many intoxicated people do.
129. Dr Garabette's opinion was that the misconduct occurred in the context of [REDACTED]. He considered, however, that alcohol intoxication was likely to have been the most significant contributor, particularly in relation to the Respondent's failure to remove himself from the relevant situations at an earlier stage. He further opined that, absent alcohol consumption, the Respondent may have been better able to regulate his behaviour and avoid inappropriate actions.
130. The Tribunal noted that both experts agreed that the principal contributor to the Respondent's behaviour was his alcohol consumption, and that, absent such consumption, the misconduct would not have occurred, [REDACTED]. In those circumstances, the Tribunal considered that, whilst the Respondent's culpability would otherwise have fallen within the high category, it was appropriately reduced to the medium category in light of the medical evidence and its impact on his judgment and behaviour at the material time.
131. In assessing harm, the Tribunal considered both the impact on the individuals concerned and the wider reputational harm to the profession. The Respondent's conduct caused understandable distress to his colleagues. Evidence was given that junior staff were affected upon returning to work following the December event; Colleague B was visibly distressed immediately following the Respondent's conduct towards her; and Colleague A was similarly distressed by the Respondent's comments.
132. The Tribunal emphasised that the greater the extent of a respondent's departure from the complete integrity, probity and trustworthiness expected of a solicitor, the greater the consequent harm to the reputation of the profession. The Respondent's misconduct represented a serious and significant departure from those standards. It included repeated racist language and antisemitic comments, together with inappropriate, unwanted, and sexual touching of several colleagues, two instances of which were found to be sexually motivated. The Tribunal therefore assessed the overall level of harm, including reputational harm, as high.
133. In light of its findings on culpability and harm, the Tribunal concluded that the seriousness of the Respondent's misconduct was high.
134. There were several aggravating factors engaged by the Respondent's conduct. His misconduct was deliberate and repeated, and included an element of sexual misconduct. The Respondent's use of racist and antisemitic language demonstrated hostility directed towards protected characteristics. The Tribunal further found that the Respondent knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that his behaviour was in material breach of his obligations as a solicitor, including the duty to protect the public, to maintain the reputation of the profession, and to act in a manner which does not discriminate, and which promotes equality, diversity, and inclusion. The Tribunal also took into account

that the Respondent was in a position of seniority relative to those affected by his conduct. Whilst this did not amount to an abuse of a formal position of authority, it was a relevant factor in assessing seriousness.

135. The Tribunal carefully considered the mitigation advanced on behalf of the Respondent, including the positive testimonials, and noted that he had a previously unblemished career.
136. The Tribunal also scrutinised the medical evidence relied upon by the Respondent. Whilst it accepted that the Respondent recognised the link between alcohol consumption and his misconduct, including the need to avoid excessive drinking in work-related social environments so as to minimise the risk of repetition, the Tribunal found that his overall insight remained limited. In particular, the Respondent demonstrated insufficient appreciation of the impact of his misconduct upon his colleagues and upon the reputation of the profession.
137. The Respondent indicated a willingness to undertake remedial training prior to any return to practice. The Tribunal considered that such steps would be appropriate. It noted that not all of the Respondent's misconduct could be attributed to alcohol consumption and, in those circumstances, considered that further training in areas including equality, diversity and inclusion, workplace boundaries, sexual harassment, and professional ethics would be beneficial in reducing the risk of repetition and in developing the Respondent's insight.
138. The Tribunal further noted that it would be open to the Applicant to take into account the completion of any such training when considering any future application for a practising certificate, which would remain a matter for the Applicant in accordance with its own regulatory processes.
139. The Tribunal determined that No Order, a Reprimand, or a Fine were inadequate sanctions. None of these options were commensurate with the seriousness of the misconduct or the risk to the public and the reputation of the profession.
140. The Tribunal determined that a suspension from the Roll was the appropriate penalty in this case. Public confidence in the legal profession demanded no lesser sanction. The Tribunal identified the need to protect both the public and the reputation of the legal profession from future harm from the Respondent by removing his ability to practise, but neither the protection of the public nor the protection of the reputation of the legal profession justified striking off the Roll.
141. The Tribunal therefore imposed a suspension from the Roll on the Respondent for a period of 12 months.

### **Costs**

142. The Tribunal ordered that the Respondent pay the Applicant's costs of the proceedings. Detailed quantum and any related issues were reserved for assessment by the High Court.

**Applications arising at the conclusion of the hearing**

143. *Application to delay the lodging of the Order with The Law Society; and Application to delay the date on which the Tribunal's Order becomes effective*

143.1 The Tribunal's decision regarding these applications can be viewed **here**.

**Statement of Full Order**

144. The Tribunal ORDERED that the Respondent, RYAN SEAN JACK WILLIAMS, solicitor, be SUSPENDED from practice as a solicitor for the period of 12 months to commence on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of February 2026.

145. The Tribunal further ORDERED that the Respondent do pay the Applicant's costs of these proceedings such costs to be subject to detailed assessment on the standard basis, unless otherwise agreed.

DATED AND FILED WITH THE LAW SOCIETY

This 27<sup>t</sup> day of May 2026

On behalf of the Tribunal

*L Boyce*

L Boyce  
Chair