

## **Freshfields faces second lawsuit over age-discrimination**

### **claims**

Michael Herman

Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, the elite London law firm that is fighting an age-discrimination claim from a former partner, is being sued by another ex-employee, it emerged yesterday.

Lois Moore, a highflying mergers and acquisitions partner who left Freshfields late last year, has accused the firm of age discrimination and is seeking undisclosed compensation.

Ms Moore, now a partner in the London office of the New York-based Shearman and Sterling, declined to comment on her claim, which was confirmed by legal sources.

Freshfields acknowledged that a second lawsuit had been filed but would not confirm that Ms Moore was the claimant.

News of the additional lawsuit emerged on the sixth day of the employment tribunal hearing of a case brought by Peter Bloxham, Freshfields' former head of insolvency. He has accused the firm of age discrimination on the ground that changes to its pension scheme affected partners differently according to their age.

Ms Moore's claim covers much of the same legal ground and has been deferred by the employment tribunal pending the outcome of the existing case. If Mr Bloxham wins his case, it is likely that Ms Moore would also be successful, potentially leading to further claims against the firm.

Freshfields strongly denies the claims. It said: "In responding to the Bloxham claim, we are showing that the pension reforms were all about fairness and ♦ as the law allows ♦ a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim." Freshfields added that the other claim was "similar".

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Lawyers have predicted that new age-discrimination laws that came into effect last October will lead to a deluge of claims from their own profession. Ronnie Fox, founder of Fox solicitors and an expert in partnership law, said that he was in constant contact with lawyers at all levels who were exploring suing current or former employers.

Clive Howard, an employment partner at Russell Jones and Walker, said that the two Freshfields claims were “the tip of the iceberg”.

Although the two claims relate to a specific change in Freshfields’ pension scheme, lawyers believe that age-discrimination legislation will prove a rich picking ground for disgruntled colleagues. Mr Howard expects the system of “lock step”, where a portion of a law firm partner’s pay is based on how long they have been at the firm, to come under heavy fire.