

## **NORTHERN IRELAND**

### **The Law Society of Northern Ireland**

The Law Society represents 2,200 solicitors working in some 550 firms based in over 74 geographical locations throughout Northern Ireland. With the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly we find ourselves in the cusp of democratic change, affecting the working environment within which our members and the Society operates. Further changes may still come as political negotiations over the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly continue.

#### **Representation**

The Society has engaged actively with our local legislature. The Society has provided evidence to and advised the Committees and Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly on a number of issues. To ensure political parties are informed of the issues affecting our membership the Society meet with the justice spokesmen of all political parties on a regular basis.

#### **Regulation**

The proposals of a recent review of legal services in Northern Ireland, which followed on from the review in England and Wales, in which local circumstances were considered in the local context are currently being deliberated on by Government. Under the proposals the Society would continue to perform its regulatory function subject to;

- a. increased lay representation on relevant Law Society committees;
- b. the Law Society's client complaints committee and department being functionally separate from the Law Society Council; and
- c. the oversight of a Legal Services Oversight Commissioner who will have the power to review and set targets for the performance of the Society's complaints handling service and advise on regulatory matters.

The legislation implementing the review is currently being drafted and publication is expected within the coming months.

#### **Education**

Trainee solicitors in Northern Ireland are required to complete a period of office training under indentures of apprenticeship and to pass professional exams. This is a two year sandwich course. Consistently the number of applicants well exceeds the places available. The Society's current arrangements for both admission and training are under review and the Society has recently accredited a new provider of legal training increasing the spaces available for trainee solicitors.