



Report to the 51st European Presidents' Conference 2023, Vienna

Report of the Law Society of Ireland



Overview

The Law Society of Ireland has representative, regulatory and educational functions in respect of the solicitors' profession. It delivers high-quality legal education and training, encourages and supports the highest professional standards, and places significant emphasis on civic engagement, supporting local community initiatives and driving diversity and inclusion within the profession.

The Society is governed by a Council, comprising elected and nominated members of the solicitors' profession. A new Council is elected every year in November. It delegates statutory functions to a wide range of committees. A president and two vice-presidents are elected each year from among the elected Council members.

Transforming legal education

The 2018 Peart Commission is the most recent comprehensive review of solicitor training in this jurisdiction, with particular attention given by the Commission to the Society's Professional Practice Course (PPC). The Peart Commission proposed a number of reforms to that system of training, including:

The introduction of the new 'fused' PPC

The system of solicitor training in Ireland has to-date comprised two-full time courses, namely the PPC I, a six-month full-time training course, and the shorter PPC II of approximately three-months duration which commences following the successful completion of the PPC I and once the trainees had completed a substantial period of in-office experience. The Peart Commission mandated the introduction of the new 'fused' PPC, a unitary course bringing together into one academic year the entire taught elements of the solicitor training, thus providing significant logistical and practical advantages to trainees and firms. The new 'fused' PPC commenced in September 2022. The PPC 2022 represents the biggest change to solicitor training since 2000.

The core curriculum on the full-time PCC course will now run from September to April each year and will include a continued focus on such skills as negotiations, research, drafting, advocacy, interviewing and advising and presentation skills, together with an enhanced focus on more general skills such as leadership, project management, office and legal technology, and finance skills. Professional responsibility, including enhanced coverage of legal ethics, solicitors' accounts and rules of professional conduct and law firm life, will also form an integral part of the core curriculum. These are in addition to courses, such as business law, dispute resolution, land law, probate, family law and taxation. Psychology of a lawyer and legal practice Irish will continue to be part of the core curriculum.

Trainees must also complete four or more advanced electives as part of their overall training. Advanced electives can be completed at any point during the traineeship period, including during the in-office training period. A programme of advanced electives will be provided (i) by the Law School at Law Society of Ireland (ii) some will be co-provided and (iii) external advanced electives will also be accredited by the Law Society. A suite of 25 Law School advanced electives will be offered to trainees this year.

Our commitment, as always, is to enhance the skills and career opportunities of trainee solicitors. We strive to do this by providing a diverse range of advanced electives that cover core areas for every solicitor's practice, together with more niche innovative topics including topics outside the strictly legal domain.

PPC Hybrid

The new 'fused' PPC Hybrid commenced in December 2022. This is the fourth iteration of the PPC Hybrid (i.e. a part-time version of the PPC) and underscores its ongoing viability and relevance as an alternative means of qualification. The PPC Hybrid makes greater use of best practice in online learning, doing away with the need to relocate to Dublin for an extended period. It also permits trainees to stay in full-time employment during the delivery of the PPC. As such it was deliberately structured in such a way to meet

the Law Society's priority with regard to diversity and inclusion, making the training more accessible for more mature trainees and those with family and other caring commitments.

PPC Hybrid also provides geographical flexibility, with a much greater proportion traineeships located outside of the Dublin metropolitan area than on the full-time equivalent. Facilitating geographical diversity provides trainees with the opportunity to study, train and qualify into their local communities, ensuring the vibrancy of the profession in every part of the country. The part-time structure of the PPC Hybrid has also provided new opportunities for traineeships, with an enhanced number of traineeships located in 'in-house' settings or Public Service Bodies.

Public legal education

The Law Society runs a number of public legal education initiatives within the local community. The Law Society's **Everyone Can Code** programme is a voluntary initiative between Law Society staff and Stanhope Street Primary School, a local school in Dublin 7. Students attend the Law Society to learn the basics of code through the Apple Everyone Can Code programme.

In 2022 the Law Society launched a new **Legal Ambitions Law Module** for 16/17-year-old Transition Year (TY) students in schools across Ireland. 13,800 students from 155 schools registered to take part. This TY Programme encourages students to consider a career in law by providing an insight into the role of a solicitor in practice. It is free of charge and delivers for weeks of legal lessons entirely online. The lessons cover themes such as social justice, human rights and climate change. The programme looks at how the law can be relevant to the daily lives of participants and promotes awareness of the legal processes, constitutional principles, and values, which underpin the rule of law in Ireland.

The Law Society have launched the **Grainne O'Neill Memorial Essay Competition**. The national competition honours the life and legacy of the late Judge Gráinne O'Neill. Students from all over Ireland have been invited to take part by submitting an essay on "*The law and social media: striking a balance between freedom of expression and responsible usage.*" The Gráinne O'Neill Memorial Legal Essay Competition, like other public legal education initiatives, sets out to promote an interest and engagement with the law and legal concepts.

Law Society Psychological Services

Law Society Psychological Services was established in March 2022 to optimise potential throughout the legal life cycle. Details of key initiatives are detailed below.

The Third Pillar of Professionalism

The Professional Practice Shrink Me; Psychology of a Lawyer course for trainees has evolved into The Complete Lawyer course. It focuses on internal development and the key psychological characteristics of a lawyer required for successful professional practice.

Law Society Psychological Services collaborated with the Law Society Diploma Centre to provide The Complete Professional online module relating to professional wellbeing, optimising potential through peer-support initiatives and creating positive workplace cultures.

Dignity at Work

- The Law Society has been working collaboratively with members and trainees to implement an evidenced-based programme for positive change in response to findings from Law Society's [Dignity Matters Report](#).
- Over 700 delegates attended the Law Society Skillnet Business of Wellbeing Summit in October 2022, which focused on the topic of dignity at work.

- Law Society [Dignity at Work Toolkit](#) was launched in late 2022 to provide tailored support to the legal profession on the prevention, intervention and resolution of workplace bullying, harassment and sexual harassment.
- A [Dignity Matters video](#) was created with Law Society members to raise awareness of the impact of bullying and harassment on individuals and organisations and to share best practices for creating healthy workplace cultures.
- A Dignity at Work Contact Point was established through LegalMind offering specialist information and support for any Law Society member who may be experiencing a dignity at work issue.
- A Belonging module has been embedded on The Complete Lawyer Course for PPC trainees providing necessary skills and knowledge to create inclusive workplace environments.
- A Bystander Intervention Workshop was delivered in partnership with University College Cork to PPC trainees to promote recognition of unacceptable workplace behaviours and identify ways to intervene positively.

Support Psychological Wellness

Law Society Psychological Services has been providing psychological supports and services throughout the legal lifecycle.

Over 50% of all Law Society trainees have availed of free Time-Concentrated Therapy with the in-house Law Society Counselling team.

- LegalMind is available to all Law Society members and practising certificate holders. This provides immediate access to subsidised counselling support operated independently through Spectrum.Life.

Model and Encourage Leadership

- A professional Steering Group of experts was established to guide the work of Law Society Psychological Services.
- Law Society is represented on the International Bar Association's new professional-wellbeing commission established in November 2022.
- The Working with Complex Clients Summit was delivered in collaboration with Law Society Professional training and provided psychological insights, legal skills and sharing of international trauma-informed best-practices.

Build Community

- A series of online and in-person events, workshops and fireside chats have been developed to enhance a sense of community in members throughout the legal life cycle. Law Society members can access these support sessions through [Law Society Skillnet LegalED](#) platform and through the Law Society's own [YouTube channel](#).
- The Law Society has been developing peer support initiatives for legal professions and will roll out nation-wide programmes in 2023 to bring members together, supporting each other with the help of expert facilitators.

Ireland for Law

Ireland for Law is a Government-supported initiative that involves the Law Society, the Bar of Ireland, Department of Justice, IDA, and a number of large legal firms and other partners. Ireland for Law is the Irish Government's international legal services strategy (www.irelandforlaw.com).

Given Ireland's highly developed legal services sector and that it is a jurisdiction of choice for commercial contracts and international dispute resolution, it will particularly seek to promote areas where Ireland is already a world leader, including aviation finance, funds, insurance, technology, and pharmaceutical and life sciences.

This strategy has been created to represent and to position Ireland's international legal services industry. The Ireland for Law project has allowed for increased collaboration among larger firms and in-house counsel both nationally and internationally. President of the American Bar Association Deborah Enix Ross has addressed the Ireland for Law group.

Next Steps

Ireland for Law will further help to create and facilitate connections within the sector and other representative organisations at an EU level. The general summit event planned for 2023 will further help in increasing awareness, participation, and understanding of the key issues.

In February 2023, the Law Society will host a General Counsel Summit as part of Ireland for Law. The objective of the summit is to chart a way forward to increase the amount of multinational legal work transacted in Ireland using Irish law.

Policy and law reform

The Law Society provides a strong voice in policy debate to inform decision makers on matters pertaining to the justice system and law reform. Each year the Law Society makes dozens of submissions to, and appearances before, government departments to discuss policy and law reform.