



# Report to the 47th European Presidents' Conference 2019, Vienna

Report of the Law Society of Ireland



## **Overview**

The Law Society of Ireland is the educational, representative and regulatory body of the solicitors' profession in Ireland. Our vision is "to be the trusted voice of a respected solicitors' 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.

The Law Society of Ireland has almost 12,000 members. 1,229 solicitors qualified in 2018; the second highest number ever. That figure comprises 445 qualifying trainee solicitors, 752 foreign-based solicitors gaining admission to the Irish Roll of solicitors, and 30 barristers qualifying through the Law Society's conversion course.

## **Education**

In November 2018 the Law Society of Ireland launched the Peart Commission Report, developed by an expert group chaired by Mr Justice Michael Peart of the Court of Appeal.

The report contains 30 recommendations setting out a vision for the future of solicitor training in Ireland. The Commission's recommendations fall under three main themes:

1. Increasing access to the profession,
2. Innovation in education, and
3. Streamlining the established training model.

The Peart Commission was convened to develop specific actions following an independent root-and-branch review of the Law Society's pre-qualification training by a team of international experts.

That review, conducted by Professor Paul Maharg (York University, Ontario), Professor Jane Ching (Nottingham Law School) and educational consultant Jenny Crewe, was commissioned in anticipation of Section 34 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015, relating to legal education.

The Maharg Report found many aspects of the Law Society's current educational model to be impressive on an international level and found that "some aspects of initial professional education provision are ahead of the field in legal services education."

Implementing the Peart Commission recommendations will increase access to the profession for trainees across diverse educational, professional and socio-economic backgrounds and ensure the Law Society maintains its prominent position as an innovative professional legal educator globally.

## **New regulatory landscape**

The Peart Commission Report was one focal point within the wider body of on-going work underway in preparation for the new regulatory landscape in Ireland. The *Legal Services Regulation Act 2015* continues to be commenced in stages, and the Law Society maintains a strong level of positive engagement with the new Legal Services Regulatory Authority.

One specific and much sought-after aspect of the new legal services environment has been the introduction of limited liability partnerships for solicitors. The Law Society has campaigned for this modernising measure for almost two decades. The commitment by the Minister for Justice and Equality to commence the relevant sections of the Act as soon as the necessary regulations have been drafted is extremely gratifying.

## **Brexit**

The Law Society has continued to take a pragmatic approach to Brexit, maintaining regular communication with the relevant Government departments and other bodies.

With the needs of clients and the progressive Irish legal landscape as the clear focus, the Law Society has endorsed and supported an initiative to promote legal services in Ireland internationally. We have also proposed to the Department of Justice and Equality a number of reforms to attract increased litigation, arbitration and advisory work to our shores.

The number of solicitors from the jurisdiction of England and Wales joining the Irish Roll of Solicitors has continued to swell in anticipation of Britain leaving the European Union. However, these solicitors have not crossed the Irish Sea and remain based in their offices in London.

### ***Public affairs***

A key strategic objective of the Society is to provide a strong voice in policy debate to inform decision makers on matters pertaining to the justice system and law reform.

The Law Society of Ireland has made 25 formal submissions to Government over the past 12 months, containing practical recommendations for policy and law reform across a range of disciplines including, but not limited to: company law, childcare reform, human rights, and criminal law.

In 2018 a dedicated web portal was created to enable easy access to information on the Society's policy and law reform activities and other resources: [www.lawsociety.ie/policyandlawreform](http://www.lawsociety.ie/policyandlawreform)

### ***Empowering sole practitioners and smaller practices***

In April 2018, the Law Society appointed a team of management consultants to conduct a review of the challenges and opportunities facing sole practitioners and smaller practices. A survey of the profession yielded a strong response rate.

The recommendations arising from the review will assist in ensuring the growth and development of the profession by empowering practice leaders to make the changes required to optimise their business and attract new clients.

### ***Mental health supports and wellbeing in the profession***

During 2018, the Society placed supports for the wellbeing of the profession high on his agenda and engaged expert consultants to conduct a full, objective review of existing mental health and wellbeing supports offered by the Society and to provide an independent report setting out their professional opinion on these supports and recommending options available to the Society to strengthen them.

The report has been received recently and will be considered by the Society in the coming months to formulate an Action Plan on mental health and wellbeing supports for solicitors.

### ***Launch of innovative daily legal news service***

In November 2018 the Law Society officially launched [Gazette.ie](http://Gazette.ie), a daily legal news service, featuring breaking legal news and analysis not available from any other provider. In December 2018 it scooped 'Digital Product of the Year', 'Business Magazine of the Year' and 'Journalist of the Year' prizes at the Irish Magazine Awards.

[Gazette.ie](http://Gazette.ie) delivers the most important legal stories via morning news updates, a breaking news service throughout the day and, for subscribers, long-read articles from 1 January 2019. The team behind [Gazette.ie](http://Gazette.ie) will also produce video news clips featuring interviews with legislators, legal experts, practitioners and conference keynote speakers.

This online service supplements the long-established [Law Society Gazette magazine](http://Law Society Gazette magazine), with members and subscribers continuing to receive the hard-copy magazine.

### ***Calcutta Run milestone***

The Law Society's Calcutta Run – the legal fundraiser – celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018 with seven events across four cities: Dublin, Cork, Kolkata and New York.

The legal profession came together in this milestone year to raise €300,000 for charities fighting homelessness in Dublin and Kolkata, reaching a cumulative figure of €4 million over the past two decades.