



Report to the 50th European Presidents' Conference 2022, 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 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.

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, which will be 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.

This fused PPC comprises a core course which will run from September to May with four advanced electives running after this. These electives will be provided by the Law Society but will also be open to provision by others such as training firms, universities and private providers. Significant innovations have been implemented throughout education with a determined focus on diversity, inclusion and student-centered delivery. This new unitary PPC will commence on Tuesday 6 September 2022.

Massive Online Open Course (MOOC)

The Law Society's Public Legal Education initiative aims to increase awareness of the law by teaching people about our legal system and their legal rights. Every May the Law Society offers a MOOC through the Law Society's Diploma Centre.

The free five-week MOOC is open to everyone and since its launch in 2014, has attracted over 21,000 participants from over 88 countries. The MOOC is an opportunity to showcase the Law Society's innovations in online learning, and our commitment to embrace technology in the provision of legal education.

The 2022 MOOC in 'Employment Law & Remote Working – A Changing Landscape' started on 31 May and provides participants with a comprehensive guide to the key employment law issues arising in the context of hybrid and remote working models, together with other recent employment law developments. Lawyers and non-lawyers from Europe and beyond, are invited to participate in the course: [Sign up to take part in the course.](#)

Law Society Psychological Services

The Law Society recognises the primacy of psychological and emotional development to healthy, safe and fulfilling professional practice. It considers this personal, professional and sector-wide aspect as the 'Third Pillar' of legal professionalism; alongside legal knowledge and skills.

On the recommendation of the Council of the Law Society of Ireland a new and expanded Psychological Service was established in March 2022. The newly expanded Service connects and builds upon various psychological projects, which have been offered successfully, but separately, to trainees and to members for a number of years, including a range of events, supports and initiatives to approximately one thousand trainees and a growing cohort of members.

Alongside free counselling, taken up by over half of all trainee solicitors, a new bespoke method of psychoanalytically informed Reflective Practice Groups are also offered to trainees, and are being piloted with members, as a powerful means of peers supporting peers. Our members enjoy access to the Professional Wellbeing Hub, which has curated content relevant to the demands of professional life. An independent subsidised therapeutic service, LegalMind, is also available to all members and their dependents.

International Leadership

The Law Society of Ireland is at the forefront in contributing to international legal mental health and wellbeing, with its clinically-informed/research-driven approach. The Society is a key player in the International Bar Association's (IBA) Global Wellbeing Taskforce, incorporating the American Bar Association's Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programmes (CoLAP), and the IBA's European Regional Forum Working Group.

Dignity Matters

In 2021, the Law Society commissioned the [Dignity Matters survey](#) to enquire about solicitors and trainees' experience of work environments in Ireland, specifically as it relates to bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment. The report sheds light on the prevalence, nature, and impact of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment in the solicitors' profession and provides a suite of recommendations for the Law Society and the solicitors' profession to prevent, respond to, and tackle these types of behaviour together.

Key findings of the Dignity Matters survey include:

- One in three women (2.9) and one in two men (2.3) experienced bullying.
- One in two women (2.3) and one in nine men (8.6) experienced harassment.
- One in two women and one in eight men (8.3) experienced sexual harassment.
- The workplace is the most common location where these negative behaviours are experienced.

Key recommendations currently underway arising from the Dignity Matters Report include a commitment to:

- Raise awareness and normalise the conversation
- Implement and revise policies and standards
- Introduce regular and customised training
- Increase dialogue and best practice sharing
- Take ownership; show a zero-tolerance stance to bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment while publicly affirming positive workplace behaviours.
- Gather data and improve transparency
- Explore flexible reporting models
- Engage with younger members of the profession

Public affairs and public relations

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. In addition, the Society advocates on behalf of the profession, makes submissions to government with input from our volunteer committees comprising of members of the profession who advise on best practice in a range of legal areas, lobbies on essential matters at government level and develops media campaigns relating to same.

Negative Interest Rates

For example, in 2020 the Society launched a campaign against negative interest rates calling on the banks to exempt solicitor client accounts from a new higher charge to reduce further unnecessary financial pressures on consumers.

This multi-levelled lobbying and media campaign engaged Bar Associations across the country in a unified call for action by the banks. The Law Society continues to raise these issues on behalf of our members with the main national banks, the Central Bank of Ireland and to political representatives and will continue to do so until the matter is resolved in favour of ordinary consumers.

Bar Associations

The Law Society actively pursues campaigns that improve access to justice and the public's understanding of their personal legal rights. The Society engages with Bar Associations to deliver these campaigns at local level across a range of subject areas.

Legal Services Excellence Standard

At the Law Society's 2020 Annual General Meeting (AGM) the Society announced a new practice management standard for members. This is a voluntary standard which is certified through a National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI) independent audit.

The Legal Services Excellence Standard is the result of six years of research, design and development by the practice management standard working group. The next phase is the implementation of the new standard. There are four requirements in the standard, which applicants must meet, including Business Planning, Development and Continuity; Infrastructure; Operational systems – Client Care; and Human Resources, Competence and Knowledge Management.

eVoting

In 2021 the Council of the Law Society of Ireland approved the "Digital First" recommendation of the Report of the Environmental and Sustainability Task Force. Subsequently, at the Law Society's 2021 AGM resolutions were proposed and approved by members moving that the Society introduce an electronic system of voting to enable its members to vote in Society's annual election and the provincial elections electronically. This approach, and the work required to implement this, were formalised at a Special General Meeting in March 2022.

eVoting will further the Society's digital-first policy and will allow members to vote via any electronic device without the need to receive and return paper ballots through the post. Working with a leading systems provider the Law Society will develop a secure and robust system that will allow for a safe, accessible and easy to use voting experience.

Business Recovery Survey Report 2021

In an effort to understand the impact of COVID 19 on Solicitors' practices, the Law Society commissioned the Business Recovery Survey. Conducted by independent consultant Crowe between March and May 2021, the research consisted of an online survey, interviews with a cross-section of practices, and consultation with the Law

Society and other professional membership, representative, and regulatory bodies that represent sectors and businesses impacted by Covid-19.

The Business Recovery Survey Report, published in September 2021, made recommendations for the profession which were concluded from the analysis and insights.

The report found that high levels of impact have been experienced by practices during Covid with issues arising such as financial pressures, lack of new business development opportunities and operational changes to ways of working. However, the sector has proven to be agile and adaptable in the face of a challenging business environment.

Practitioners in this jurisdiction have been required to adapt quickly to innovative new ways of working such as remote working, remote client interaction, adoption of digital processes. The research found that digitalisation trend of legal services is set to continue and that the solicitors' profession is optimistic about the future.