

MAJOR SURGE OF 9% IN PC NUMBERS

An extraordinary swell in the number of solicitors with practising certs in 2019 far exceeds any annual increase seen previously. **Ken Murphy** reports

KEN MURPHY IS DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE LAW SOCIETY



The number of solicitors with practising certificates (PCs) on 31 December 2019 was a remarkable 9% higher than on 31 December 2018 – almost double the percentage increase of the previous year.

The equivalent year-on-year increase in 2018 was 4.8%. This substantial surge from an annual increase of 4.8%, to one of 9%, far exceeds any annual increase witnessed previously.

The Law Society publishes practising certificate figures every

year for the final date of the practice year, 31 December, so that like can be compared with like.

In total, there were 11,959 solicitors with practising certificates on 31 December 2019. The equivalent figure on 31 December 2018 was 10,972. Accord-

THE ADDITIONAL
FACTOR AT WORK
THAT EXPLAINS
THE OVERALL
INCREASE IS
THE NUMBER
OF PRACTISING
CERTIFICATES
TAKEN OUT BY
SOLICITORS IN
INTERNATIONAL
LAW FIRMS

LAW FIRM PRACTISING SOLICITOR NUMBERS (AS OF 31/12/2019)

| 2019 ranking | 2018 ranking | Firm name | 31/12/2019 | Diff +/- over 2018 | 31/12/2018 |
|--------------|--------------|------------------------------------|------------|--------------------|------------|
| 1 | 2 | A&L Goodbody | 313 | 21 | 292 |
| 2 | 1 | Arthur Cox | 299 | 5 | 294 |
| 3 | 3 | Matheson | 285 | 0 | 285 |
| 4 | 4 | McCann FitzGerald | 266 | -12 | 278 |
| 5 | 5 | Mason Hayes & Curran | 239 | 12 | 227 |
| 6 | 6 | William Fry | 207 | -4 | 211 |
| 7 | - | Allen & Overy LLP | 206 | 191 | 15 |
| 8 | 7 | ByrneWallace | 132 | -4 | 136 |
| 9 | 9 | Eversheds Sutherland* | 108 | 4 | 104 |
| 10 | 10 | Ronan Daly Jermyn | 107 | 6 | 101 |
| 11 | 8 | Maples and Calder | 105 | -8 | 113 |
| 12 | 13 | Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP | 101 | 23 | 78 |
| 13 | 11 | Beauchamps | 92 | 7 | 85 |
| 14 | 12 | Dillon Eustace | 88 | 5 | 83 |
| 15 | 17 | Walkers Ireland | 65 | 12 | 53 |
| 16 | 14 | Eugene F Collins | 64 | 3 | 61 |
| 16 | - | Pinsent Mason | 64 | 32 | 32 |
| 18 | 14 | LK Shields Solicitors | 62 | 1 | 61 |
| 18 | - | Eversheds Sutherland LLP** | 62 | - | - |
| 20 | 16 | Hayes Solicitors | 61 | 6 | 55 |
| TOTAL | | | 2,926 | | 2,564 |

These figures represent the total number of solicitors with a practising certificate, advised to the Law Society, up to and including 31/12/2019. The total firm figure comprises a firm's primary and suboffices on the Law Society's database. * In this jurisdiction. ** Outside this jurisdiction.



PC: CIAN REDMOND

ingly the net increase of practising solicitors from one year to the next was 987.

The Brexit factor

Where has this extraordinary expansion in practising solicitors come from? Of course, the primary long-term driver is the ever-increasing number of solicitors qualifying through the Society's Law School in Blackhall Place. A total of 414 trainees qualified as new solicitors in 2019.

But, obviously, there is a major additional factor at work to explain the overall increase. It is a factor that has increasingly had an impact on these numbers in the last few years. It did so again in 2019, to an unprecedented extent.

This additional factor is the number of practising certificates taken out by solicitors in international law firms who have come on the Roll in Ireland since 1 January 2016 (see the 'Brexit Backstop' article, December 2019 *Gazette*, p18), and who choose to take out practising certificates in

this jurisdiction, regardless of the fact that they have no office here.

For example, the spectacular 'new entrant' law firm in this regard in 2019 was Allen & Overy LLP. That international law firm (one of the elite group known as 'the magic circle') did not rank in the 20 largest firms in Ireland (by PC number), published in the *Gazette* in January/February 2019. However, as can be seen from the table (left), on 31 December 2019, the firm had no fewer than 206 solicitors with practising certificates. This ranked it the seventh largest firm – just one PC behind William Fry – even though Allen & Overy LLP has no office in this jurisdiction.

Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer LLP increased its PC number by 23 to 101; and an additional 'new entrant', in joint 18th place in this table, is Eversheds Sutherland LLP. This is the Eversheds Sutherland firm with solicitors holding Irish PCs *outside* of this jurisdiction. The other Eversheds Sutherland firm, long established

in Dublin and previously named O'Donnell Sweeney, has 108 PCs and is ranked ninth on the table this year – as it was last year.

This year's main movers

Who are the other main movers on the table this year by comparison with last year? A&L Goodbody's return to the top of the table is achieved with an outstanding overall increase of 21 PCs to become – with 313 PCs – the first ever Irish firm to break the '300 barrier'.

A&L Goodbody's PC number increased by an impressive 7.2%, while last year's top-of-the-table firm Arthur Cox increased by 1.7% to 299. As has occurred frequently in the past, A&L Goodbody and Arthur Cox again this year alternate the first and second spots on the table.

Matheson, solidly once again in third place, neither increased nor decreased in PC numbers, but remains at 285. Last year's stellar performer, McCann FitzGerald, who increased their PC number

in 2018 by no less than 31 practitioners, in fact reduced their number by 12 (-4.3%) this year.

Consolidating their position in fifth place, Mason Hayes & Curran again, very impressively, expanded their PC number in 2019 with a 5.2% increase to 239.

Other firms with even larger percentage increases this year were Beauchamps (+7.6%), Hayes Solicitors (+10.9%), and Walkers Ireland, who increased their PC number in 2019 by a whopping 22.6%, from 53 to 65 practitioners.

Fewer 'Brexit PCs' in future?

The Law Society is budgeting on the conservative basis that fewer solicitors based outside this jurisdiction will take out Irish PCs in 2020. The level of general uncertainty in relation to Brexit has somewhat reduced. In addition, the Society's guidance, published in May 2019, entitled *Practising Certificates: Solicitors Outside the Irish Jurisdiction*, has clarified what an Irish practising certificate entitles the holder to do. [E](#)