

**Law Society of Ireland submission cover letter
copied from direct email submission**

Date: 4 March 2020

Dear Brian,

This is the Law Society submission to the Legal Services Regulatory Authority in response to your letter to me dated 19 December, 2019, headed 'Annual report on the admission policies of legal professions'.

In this connection I refer to our telephone conversation in January 2020 when you agreed to extend the time, for receipt of the Society's submission, beyond the date originally mentioned in your letter.

Your letter consisted primarily of a relatively lengthy series of queries seeking specific statistical information from the Society.

I am glad now to be able to confirm that all of the detailed statistical information you have sought, set out in response to each of your letter's individual queries, is supplied in the first of the documents I attach. Much of the information is set out in the form of tables, graphs and coloured charts which I trust you will find helpful. Indeed some additional statistical information, not sought in your specific queries, is also to be found in the attached by way of, I hope, useful further background material.

Naturally if there is anything unclear in relation to any of the statistical information supplied, or any other part of this submission, you should not hesitate to revert seeking clarification.

Additional and, I think, highly relevant statistical information is to be found in two Law Society Gazette articles which I also attach comprising (a) 'Number Of Solicitors Seeking "Brexist Backstop" Continues To Grow' (December 2019 Gazette), and (b) 'Major Surge of 9% in PC Numbers' (January/February 2020 Gazette).

While what I believe are comprehensive responses to your letter's statistical and other requests for information are furnished in the attached, your question (number 17 on our count) seeking our view on 'The demand for the services of solicitors in 2019 including key indicators that you may have' requires an additional analysis and response.

It cannot be questioned that one of the key indicators of demand for the services of solicitors, one which varies from time to time, is the level of activity in the Irish economy and, indeed, the economy internationally. That level of economic activity was high in 2019, as evidenced by the levels of economic growth recorded in that year, albeit the growth declined in the second half of the year. The economic activity, of course, is very far from uniform across the country with most of it widely recognised to be concentrated in the cities in general and in the Dublin area in particular. Nor, of course, does growth in demand affect all areas, or sizes, of legal practice equally.

In normal times the number of Practising Certificates, taken out in an individual year, would be a good measure of the level of demand, in that year, for the services of solicitors.

The remarkable year-on-year increase of 9% in the number of Practising Certificates on the final day of the most recent practice year, 31 December, 2019 - up from an equivalent

growth increase of 4.8% in the year to 31 December, 2018 - would in normal times indicate phenomenal growth in the demand for the services of solicitors in the calendar year in question.

But we are not 'in normal times'. The situation is immensely distorted by the Brexit phenomenon as the attached statistics demonstrate. I refer in particular to the extraordinary development whereby almost 20% of the names of solicitors on the Roll in this jurisdiction are England and Wales qualified solicitors whose names have been added to the Roll here since 1 January, 2016. This is, I would suggest, an extremely open 'admission policy' by any standard.

The opening of offices in this jurisdiction, for the first time, by global law firms is just one further indication of the ever-increasing levels of competition in, as well as the demand for, the services of Irish solicitors. However, even without opening offices here, international law firms compete with Irish law firms for legal work.

The levels of cost and, of course, of quality of solicitors' services in general are the product of intense competition for legal work between more than 2,200 individual firms of solicitors. The level of demand solicitors services outside of Dublin and, to a much lesser extent, some other urban areas, shows few if any signs of growth - or even of any sustained recovery since the economic crash. Smaller firms of five solicitors or less, who predominate in particular outside the cities, were frequently still struggling economically in 2019. I attach for information a copy of 'the Market Study of Sole Practitioners and Smaller Legal Practices in Ireland', produced for the Law Society by the consultants Crowe, which shows the efforts the Society has felt compelled to make to assist solicitors' firms in this sector to adapt to a very challenging environment, to ensure their survival in the future.

In summary, the admission policy of the solicitors' profession in this jurisdiction, both in terms of the numbers qualifying through professional training here and those transferring into the profession from other jurisdictions, consistent with the need to ensure an adequate standard of education and training, is a remarkably open policy as the information in this submission demonstrates.

Kind regards,

Ken

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