

Press Release: 7 July 2022

Legal Services Regulatory Authority Publishes Annual Report on Admissions 2021

The Legal Services Regulatory Authority today publishes its third annual report on the admission policies of the legal professions.

The report, *Pathways to the Professions 2021: Annual Report on Admission Policies of the Legal Professions*, documents the number of persons admitted to practise as both solicitors and barristers in 2021, based on figures supplied to the Authority by the professional bodies.

It is the third Annual Report on Admissions that the Authority has submitted to the Minister for Justice under section 33(1) of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015.

This annual report looks back on a twelve month period which, with the after effects of Brexit and the ongoing impact of Covid-19 pandemic, can in no way be considered a normal year in terms of numbers and patterns of admissions to the professions and the overall dynamics at play in the legal services sector.

The Authority states in the report that:

“The impact of the pandemic was not experienced uniformly across all sectors of the domestic economy nor within the legal services sector. Its effect was felt to differing degrees by solicitors and barristers depending on a range of factors including area of practice and, for solicitors, firm size. By the second quarter of 2021 there were signs of general recovery in employment rates and earnings across a range of economic sectors, including all professions. The year also saw the return of some optimism and confidence among law firms, with the re-emergence of reported staff recruitment and retention challenges among large Dublin law firms.”

The key findings of the report include:

Solicitor Admissions

- A total of 876 solicitors were admitted to the Roll of Solicitors in 2021, a marginal decrease the previous year’s total of 906. The Roll is maintained by the Law Society of Ireland. Admission to the Roll does not legally entitle a solicitor to provide legal services, although it is a pre-requisite for applying to the Law Society for an annual practising certificate to do so.
- The 2021 Roll figures are a further indicator that the impact of Brexit as a driver for increased solicitor admissions in recent years is abating. A total of 58% of solicitors admitted to the Roll in 2021 were Law Society of Ireland qualifying solicitors, while England and Wales qualified solicitors accounted for 32% of the total admissions during the year.
- There were a total of 11,413 solicitors with practising certificates on 31 December 2021, a decrease of 441 (-4%) from 2020. This represents only the second annual drop in the number of practising certificates since 2009. Since 2021, the Law Society only issues practising certificates to solicitors who are practising or intending to practise in Ireland from

an establishment based in the jurisdiction. Practising certificates are no longer issued to solicitors who are practising other than from an establishment in Ireland.

Barrister Admissions

- A total of 180 persons were called to the Bar of Ireland by the Chief Justice in 2021, allowing them to exercise a full right of audience before all courts. This is up 13 from 167 in 2020.
- Traditionally, graduates of the King's Inns Barrister-at-Law (BL) degree have accounted for the majority of those called to the Bar each year. In a similar pattern to that observed with solicitors, the number of barristers from Northern Ireland and England and Wales called to the Bar increased in recent years due to Brexit. In 2019 there were 76 such admissions and in 2020 there were 47. In 2021, the number further dropped to 34, reflecting an easing in Brexit-related applications. King's Inns BL degree graduates accounted for 142 of the barrister admissions last year, an increase of 26 on 2020.
- The total number of barristers on the Roll of Practising Barristers maintained by the Legal Services Regulatory Authority stood at 2,933 at the end of 2021, an increase of 110 at the end of 2020. Of these, 2,180 barristers (74%) were self-employed private practitioners and members of the Law Library, and 753 (26%) were not members of the Law Library. Barristers practising outside of the Law Library included 253 barristers recorded on the Roll as working in the full-time service of the State.

Developments in Legal Practitioner Training

- The year saw ongoing work by the professional training bodies in relation to the issue of professional competencies. There was further development by the Law Society of its competency framework for solicitors while the Bar of Ireland introduced a new competency based Continuous Professional Development Scheme. (The King's Inns published its Statement of the Required Competencies of a Barrister in 2020.)
- The LSRA requested additional demographic data from the professional bodies for this year's annual report in relation to new trainee solicitors and student barristers in 2021. This shows that a higher proportion of student barristers and trainee solicitors undertaking part-time professional training courses are aged 30 and over, compared with those studying on a full-time basis.

Demand for and Costs of Services of Solicitors and Barristers

- Court business continued to be curtailed during the year, based on the necessary public health restrictions. This had an inevitable knock-on impact on the demand for services of solicitors and barristers, particularly those whose work is largely court based. Legal services like many other sectors in Ireland, continued throughout the year to operate using a hybrid model of online and face-to-face engagement. Office based law firms continued to adjust their working practices to introduce more flexibility and remote working arrangements.
- The Authority notes in this report the concerns expressed by the Bar of Ireland about the particular impact of Covid-19 restrictions on newly qualified barristers whose ability to gain in-person court experience has been curtailed due to the switch to remote hearings.

Looking Ahead

- Looking ahead, the Authority anticipates developments in 2022 with the planned introduction of new legal partnerships, which will enable barristers and solicitors to jointly provide legal services for the first time.
- In addition, the Authority will report to the Minister for Justice on the creation of a new profession of conveyancer, as requested under section 34 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015.
- The Authority will also report to the Minister on economic and other barriers facing early career solicitors and barristers with recommendations for how these may be overcome, as also requested. The LSRA has undertaken survey research and a statutory consultation as part of its preparation of this report to the Minister, which it anticipates will build on recommendations made in its 2020 Setting Standards report on legal practitioner education and training.

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Pathways to the Professions 2021: Annual Report on Admission Policies of the Legal Professions is available to download [here](#).