




LAW SOCIETY  
OF IRELAND

# ECONOMIC AND OTHER BARRIERS TO THE LEGAL PROFESSION

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1. (a) **The key economic and other barriers to entry to the professions of solicitor and their impact in terms of equality of access and entry into the legal professions and the objective of achieving greater diversity within the professions.**
  - (b) **Proposals on how key economic and other barriers to entry to the professions of solicitor may be addressed in order to improve equality of access and entry into the legal professions and achieve greater diversity within the professions, and by whom.**

The Law Society of Ireland is committed to respecting gender equality, diversity and inclusion for the benefit of its employees, its members, solicitors, trainee solicitors and the public. We recognise and value difference in those we educate, represent, regulate, employ and engage. We strive to create a culture of inclusion, mutual respect and equal opportunities. We welcome and promote diversity within the legal profession, and we encourage our members to embrace the values of diversity, inclusion and equality. We work to drive awareness of the importance and benefits of promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion within the profession and society. We actively support gender equality and are proud that the solicitors' profession in Ireland was the first in the world to achieve female majority. Likewise, we support equal rights regardless of sexual orientation and supported the passing of the Marriage Equality Referendum.

Since the launch of the Peart Commission Report in November 2018 the Society has seen a progressive reworking of legal education and training with the key objectives to remove barriers to becoming a solicitor and achieve greater diversity within the solicitor profession.

Joining the solicitor profession offers a dynamic, stimulating and varied legal career. The law influences every aspect of our lives from business, finance, property, family to employment. The route to becoming a solicitor involves commitment, examinations and professional training but in return, solicitors enjoy rewarding work, the opportunity to contribute to their community and excellent long-term career prospects.

The steps to qualify as a solicitor in Ireland are as follows:

- Preliminary Examination (non-graduates only)
- Entrance Examination to the Law Society of Ireland (FE1)
- Professional Practice Courses (from 2022 to become a single Professional Practice Course)
- In-Office Training

In this report we will examine each step for any barrier (economic or other) to entry to the professions of solicitor, and in turn how these are being addressed in order to improve equality of access and entry to the legal profession and to achieve greater diversity within the profession itself.

# 1. PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION (NON-GRADUATES)

The Law Society sees great value in diversity and has always had routes available to graduates and non graduates. The operation of the Preliminary Examination and the existence of exemptions from it make it clear that all suitable applicants can undertake training as solicitors.

The cost of the Preliminary Examination is €400. The Preliminary Examination is an initial assessment point for non-graduates seeking to qualify as solicitors. This examination is held once a year, usually in March. The examination consists of the following three papers: English, Irish Government and Politics General Knowledge. The pass mark in each paper is 50% and all three papers must be passed at one sitting in order to pass the examination. Candidates are allowed a maximum of three attempts. To sit the Preliminary Examination a candidate must be at least 21 years old.

## 1.1 THE ROLE OF THE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

Insofar as a small number qualify as solicitors through undertaking this examination, it appears to have a continued role to play. Its abolition and replacement with a graduate requirement would restrict further those seeking to qualify as solicitors

In order to facilitate the diverse range of applicants seeking to qualify as solicitors, there are categories of qualifications the Law Society pre-recognises and therefore are exempt from sitting the Preliminary Examination. These include:

- A qualification at Level 7 or higher on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).
- A degree (in any discipline) awarded by any university in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales.
- Diploma in Law, Law Society of Ireland.
- Diploma in Legal Studies, King's Inns.
- Accountants certified by the following bodies as holding the following qualifications:
  - o Associate of Chartered Accountants Ireland;
  - o Associate of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, Ireland;
  - o Associate of the Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Ireland;
  - o Associate of the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, Ireland;
  - o Associate of the Institute of Incorporated Public Accountants, Ireland;
  - o Member of the Institute of Accounting Technicians, Ireland.
- A degree awarded by a university in another country (this degree to be equivalent to a Level 7 or higher award on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications).
- An equivalent qualification to a degree, a pilots license, qualifications and experience in banking, company secretarial practice, insurance, human resource management, nursing and members of An Garda Síochána and the defence forces.

- Law clerks and legal executives with at least five years' experience. This is not an uncommon career progression. A prize of €1,000 is awarded each year to the Legal Executive with the highest mark in PPC I Criminal and Civil Litigation. Sponsored by Ronan Daly Jermyn the prize was established in 2014 to honour the memory of James O'Sullivan. James O'Sullivan joined Ronan Daly Jermyn as a law clerk in 1975 and qualified as a solicitor in 1993. At the time of his death in 2012, James was a partner in Ronan Daly Jermyn and Chair of the Society's Education Committee.

## 1.2. ENTRANCE EXAMINATION TO THE LAW SOCIETY OF IRELAND (FE1)

The Final Examination - First Part (FE1) is the entrance examination to the Law Society of Ireland. It is held twice a year, normally in spring and autumn and consists of eight papers on core legal subjects; Company Law, Constitutional Law, Law of Contract, Criminal Law, European Union Law, Equity, Law of Property and Law of Tort. The FE1 fee (and resit fee) is €105 per paper and there are eight papers in total. Currently the Society offers funding through the Access Programme which provides funding towards the FE1 covering the examination fee, travel expenses, child care and loss of income support.

At FE1 level, the Access Programme is primarily aimed at third-level law students who received funding through the Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) or Disability Access Route to Education (DARE) schemes. Each year approximately 50% of applicants have a background of receiving HEAR/DARE funding at third level. The other 50% of applicants did not receive HEAR/DARE funding at third-level and their applications are assessed by the Law Society using the equivalent HEAR/DARE criteria.

The HEAR criteria are as follows: (Low income & a minimum of two other criteria)

1. Low Income
2. Attended a DEIS school
3. Medical Card holder
4. Deprivation Index of -10 or less for the address where the candidate grew up or now resides
5. Socio Economic status of parents
6. Whether the applicant and immediate family are in receipt of social welfare

The DARE criteria are based on whether a student has a disability and has been successful in their application to join the scheme at third level with appropriate medical evidence supporting their application.

Each year the Society receives approximately 85 applications to join the scheme and over the last three years, approximately 80% of applicants have been successful in their applications to join the scheme. No candidate meeting the aforementioned assessment criteria has been refused funding.

The scheme is open for applications from everyone. There is no age restriction for entry on to the scheme. The Access Programme assists the Society in creating an inclusive learning environment facilitating individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds.

## FE1 CANDIDATES AWARDED ACCESS FUNDING

TOTAL 114 SCHEME PARTICIPANTS		
Participants from Ireland	85	75%
Participants from countries other than Ireland	29	25%
Male	27	24%
Female	87	76%

## COUNTRIES OF BIRTH

Ireland	85
USA	1
Angola	1
Brazil	1
Bulgaria	1
Cameroon	1
Democratic Republic of Congo	1
UK	3
Latvia	2
Lithuania	2
Moldova	1
Nigeria	5
Northern Ireland	2
Philippines	1
Poland	2
Romania	3
Sierra Leone	1
Ukraine	1

### Summary:

- 1 in 4 of currently funded Access Programme participants at FE1 level is from a country other than Ireland.
- At FE1 level, the scheme is currently serving participants from 18 different countries.

### 1.2.1 THE FE1 ACTS AS A “LEVELLER”

The FE1 ensures that trainees meet minimum requirements in the core areas of academic law. It acts as a “leveller” for the subsequent period of study. The potential for varying standards in the third level institutions justify the FE1 as a common standard that unites all entrants. This is important in that there are at least 50 undergraduate law degrees offered by 16 third level institutions (in addition to two further universities in Northern Ireland).

This examination also ensures that trainee solicitors, who come from different educational backgrounds and third level studies of all disciplines, whether in arts, humanities, engineering or science, commence their practical training in the Society with a consistent standard of knowledge in those eight subjects. This entry level standard of competence is important, given the wide variety of applicants to the Society in terms of practice experience and academic qualifications.

### 1.2.2 HOW IT IS EXAMINED

The FE1 is examined by leading academics and practitioners from across third level institutions and law firms and is overseen by an independent Board of Examiners which has two public interest representatives. The FE1 syllabi are compiled by leading academics from the third level institutions. Each syllabus comprehensively addresses the subject area. While the examination is demanding, it ensures the core legal subject areas are tested in an equitable manner.

#### FE1 BOARD OF EXAMINERS 2021

- Dr Thomas B Courtney, Solicitor
- Professor Brian Hutchinson, UCD
- Professor Eoin Carolan, SC, UCD
- Professor Colm O’Cinneide, University College London
- Dr. Cliona Kelly, UCD
- Mr P J Ryan, LIT
- Dr Fergus Ryan, NUI Maynooth
- Professor Shane Kilcommins, University of Limerick
- Professor Finbarr McAuley, UCD
- Ms Nuala Egan, BL
- Dr Noel McGrath, UCD
- Dr Caoimhin MacMaolain, TCD
- Mr Noel Travers, SC
- Dr Aisling Parkes, UCC
- Professor Ray Murphy, NUI, Galway
- Mr Raymond Friel, University of Limerick
- Mr Eoin Quill, University of Limerick
- Professor Judith Harford, UCD
- Mr Patrick Diggins

### 1.2.3 ACCELERATED ACCESS

On 1 January 2020 new regulations came into operation that mean Ireland’s future solicitors can now take the FE1 earlier in their studies; can sit and pass less exams in their first attempt; and have a longer timeframe to pass all eight core subjects. The changes outlined in the Solicitors Acts 1954 to 2011 (Apprenticeship and Education) (Amendment) Regulations 2019 provide a more flexible approach to becoming a solicitor. If students have completed the first or any subsequent year of a course leading to a qualification at level 7 or higher on the Irish National Framework of Qualifications or a degree awarded by a university in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, they are eligible to sit the FE1. This accelerates access into the profession and facilitates students in taking the FE1 in a more timely and effective manner. Third level students can overlap their degree exams with the FE1 exam and take subjects in the FE1 immediately after studying that subject at third level. A non-graduate that has successfully completed the Preliminary Examination or has been granted an exemption from the Preliminary Examination is also eligible to sit the FE1.

The time within which all eight subject examinations should be passed, starting from the time of the candidate first passing one or more of them, has been extended from five to seven years.

FE1 candidates need to pass just one exam in a sitting to move forward. There is no longer a requirement for the candidate to sit and pass at least three subject examinations in the first sitting, before being able to proceed further. Candidates can now sit the eight subject examinations one or more at a time in one or more sittings.

#### 1.2.4 ALTERNATIVES ON HOW TO PROVIDE EQUALITY IN ENTRANTS

The FE1 provides an assurance of prior knowledge of academic law. An entrance examination for the vocational stages of education is common practice across other jurisdictions, and can be contrasted with “bar examinations” which govern entry to the profession. In fact, the recently introduced entrance examination for entry to the French EDA Conseil National Des Barreaux justifies this approach as providing equality in entrants.

There is a compelling public interest in maintaining the FE1 in that it ensures that all trainee solicitors possess a minimum level of knowledge in terms of the academic law. It also allows the design of the professional course to proceed without any concern as to variances in the knowledge of the academic law. This is in contrast with Northern Ireland where refresher courses in Company Law have to be provided by the Institute at the beginning of its course as this is not a required entrance subject there.

The alternative to the FE1 would be a monitoring of the Law Degrees by the Society and the Bar or an alternative body. In Scotland, the Law Society of Scotland is the body that formally approves the award of an LLB by a university law school. As there is no formal appraisal in Ireland this exercise would be resource intensive and could prove contentious.

An appraisal system would also have the potential to encroach on academic freedom in the provision of primary law degrees. Before the current system was introduced the Society wrote to the then university law schools asking if they would certify that their courses covered the syllabus of the FE1 in the context of discussions around exemptions. The heads of the law schools refused to do so indicating that this would infringe on their academic freedom.

This was the model followed in England and Wales with the concept of “a qualifying law degree”. However the new Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE) will be introduced from 1 September 2021. Under the new training regime, to be eligible for admission as a solicitor, candidates must pass a two part centralised assessment: SQE1 and SQE2

The SQE1 will consist of two exams. Each exam will consist of 180 multiple choice questions and will be a closed book examination. The examinations will assess Functioning Legal Knowledge (FLK) covering the following subject areas:

- Business Law and Practice
- Dispute Resolution
- Contract
- Tort
- Legal Systems
- Constitutional & Administrative Law and EU Law and Legal Services
- Property Practice
- Wills and Administration of Estates

- Solicitors' Accounts.
- Land Law
- Trusts
- Criminal Law and Practice.

SQE1 must be passed before SQE2 can be taken. There will be no exemptions from the SQE 1 examination. All candidates whether they have a law degree or not will have to sit and pass the examination. It will ensure consistency in standards of knowledge and understanding in the foundations of legal knowledge, especially from students with law degrees.

For SQE2, candidates will sit a mixture of written and oral assessments to demonstrate skills across five legal contexts (the reserved legal activities plus business law and practice). Candidates will sit a total of 16 assessments and the legal skills assessed are:

- Client interviewing and attendance note/legal analysis
- Advocacy
- Case and matter analysis
- Legal research
- Legal writing and legal drafting.

The assessment is weighted 50:50 between skills and application of the law. Ethics and professional conduct will be examined across the two assessments.

### 1.3 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE COURSES (PPC)

The PPC is a full-time training course. It is practice-oriented and throughout the course trainees learn how to do the work of a solicitor. Lectures are supported by small tutorial and skills groups of between 6 and 20 trainee solicitors working together on legal problems. Classes are almost all delivered by practising solicitors who are experts in their own areas of practice. The associate faculty includes solicitors from large commercial firms, solicitors working for the State, general practitioners and in-house lawyers. There are currently in the region of 1,200 solicitors teaching for the Society; that means more than 10% of all practising solicitors are involved in educating the next generation of the solicitor profession.

#### **Applicants for the PPC are required to have:**

- Passed or gained exemption from the Preliminary Examination (non-graduates).
- Passed the FE1 Entrance Examinations.
- Found an eligible (practising) solicitor to act as a training solicitor.

Currently the society runs two full-time courses for trainee solicitors, the Professional Practice Course I (PPC I) and Professional Practice Course II (PPC II). The PPC I is a six month full-time course with 363 contact hours. PPC II has 63 contact hours. The course fees are €8,300 for the PPC I and €4,500 for the PPC II. These fees have not changed since 2008.

This current 'sandwich' model of the Professional Practice Course will end with a more streamlined, single course launching in September 2022.

While there is educational value in trainees engaging with educational courses after a period of time in-office, the current model has proved quite restrictive for training firms. For those

with large numbers of trainees, their movement in and out of the firm is a formidable logistical challenge. For smaller firms this change will also be attractive as a trainee will work with them for an unbroken period of time. This difficulty outweighs the educational merit of the “sandwich” system. The new single PPC will introduce greater flexibility.

We recognise that there are core areas of knowledge that all solicitors must know. This is shaped partly by the statutory framework within which solicitors work and partly also by new developments and new areas of practice that will open up for solicitors. These core subject areas will be kept under review and it is likely that the content of the PPC will change on a biennial basis.

### 1.3.1 FUNDING

The Society currently offers a suite of programmes with the aim of significantly decreasing the cost of qualification and to increase diversity in the profession by eliminating the economic barrier to entering the solicitor profession.

### 1.3.2 THE ACCESS PROGRAMME

The Access Programme provides financial support in respect of the cost of the FE1 examination, indenture registration fee, PPC I, PPC II course fees and enrolment fee. This programme pays fees and maintenance for students from a background of socio-economic disadvantage. The Access Programme represents a major achievement in respect of the Society’s goal of encouraging diversity in respect of the trainee solicitor and qualified solicitor population in Ireland.

Each year the Law Society receives approximately 85 applications to join the scheme and over the last three years, approximately 80% of applicants have been successful in their applications to join the scheme. The scheme is open for applications from everyone. There is no age restriction for entry on to the scheme. The Access Programme assists the Law Society in creating an inclusive learning environment, facilitating individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds. Participants to the scheme may have faced additional challenges (sometimes at an early age) due to their life circumstance but those particular challenges faced by those individuals may aid them in becoming a well-rounded solicitor with wisdom gained from their experience in life. This will also help serve the future clients of these participants once they qualify as solicitors.

Participants on the scheme have many different backgrounds and no two applications to the Access Programme are the same. The overriding common trait amongst applicants to the scheme is that but for the assistance of the Access scheme, those individuals feel that they would not be in a position to train as a solicitor because of a lack of financial resources.

Examples of past participants situations include:

- Single parent (perhaps at a young age) or through separation/divorce.
- Asylum seeker who came to Ireland at a young age without having previously spoken English.
- Member of the travelling community.
- Caring for a very sick child, partner or parent.

- Previously received a criminal conviction. (Where an individual applying for consent to enter a training contract has criminal conviction(s) which are not spent under law, their application must be approved by the Law Society Education Committee).
- Grown up with a parent who was involved in criminality.
- First person in their immediate and extended family to attend college/university.
- Attended a secondary school where the majority of their peers did not proceed to third level education.
- Grown up with one or both of their parents unemployed or working in unskilled jobs.
- Parents may not have completed secondary education or attended School State examinations.
- Come from a very large family.
- Grown up in a home where there was substance misuse or domestic violence issues.
- Have a disability which has had a significant impact on their life.
- Mature student who initially as a child did not complete second level education but returned to education later in life.
- Currently unemployed.
- Experience of financial distress due to the loss of a business.
- Experienced the loss of their home. e.g. repossession by mortgage holders
- Grown up or currently reside in an area badly impacted by deprivation.

## CURRENT STATISTICS FOR THE ACCESS PROGRAMME

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS: 300		
Participants from Ireland	231	77%
Participants from countries other than Ireland	69	23%
Male	73	24%
Female	227	76%

## COUNTRIES OF BIRTH

Ireland	231	Pakistan	1
Angola	1	Philippines	1
Brazil	1	Poland	6
Bulgaria	1	Romania	5
Cameroon	1	Russia	1
Democratic Republic of Congo	1	Serbia	1
Jamaica	1	Sierra Leone	1
Latvia	2	South Africa	1
Lithuania	2	UK	20
Moldova	1	Ukraine	2
New Zealand	1	USA	3
Nigeria	11	Venezuela	1
Northern Ireland	3		

### 1.3.3 SCOTT SCHOLARSHIP

The Scott Scholarship launched in 2019 and provides full funding in respect of the FE1 examination, indenture registration fee, PPC I, PPC II course fees and enrolment fee. This is a new privately sponsored scholarship worth €15,000 each and has been awarded on two occasions in 2019 and 2020.

### 1.3.4 BURSARY AND HARDSHIP FUNDS

The Society operates a Bursary Scheme which provides maintenance grants to trainees attending the Professional Practice Courses. This assists in reducing the financial burden on trainees when qualifying as a solicitor. It provides financial assistance where their own resources or those of their family are inadequate to fund their studies. The programme is helping to create a broader spectrum of solicitors; vital in building a legal profession reflecting the diversity of the society it serves. Applications are decided by the Bursary Committee (a sub-committee of the Education Committee) based on comparative hardship. So far 59 Bursaries have been awarded with a total value of 175,000 euro.

Trainees can also avail of a Hardship Fund to cater for situations whereby they face an unexpected situation impacting on their financial capacity.

### 1.3.5 TAX RELIEF

The Professional Practice Courses are included on the list of post-graduate courses eligible for tax relief. The relief applies at the standard rate of tax and can be claimed through Revenue.ie.

### 1.3.6 SUSI GRANT

The Professional Practice Courses are an approved course for grant purposes. Trainees wishing to attend the PPC I which commences each year in September apply online to the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI). Trainees do not have to wait for confirmation of their place on the PPC I before applying for a grant. This is a new initiative on the part of the Department of Education in order that a greater number of grant applications being processed before the start of the PPC I. PPC I applicants who meet the qualifying conditions for the special rate of grant will be eligible to have their post-graduate tuition fees paid up to the maximum fee limit (€6,270). A further limited number of students who would previously have qualified under the standard grant thresholds will qualify to have a €2,000 contribution made towards the costs of their fees.

However we feel it is extremely unfair that PPC I applicants are not entitled to any maintenance payment under the Student Grant Scheme. The elimination of the maintenance grant means that no state funding is provided to trainee solicitors. In addition currently SUSI do not provide grants for the Hybrid Professional Practice Courses in the situation whereby participants on both course models follow the same syllabus and the Hybrid courses involve substantial onsite attendance as well as regular interactive tutorials/workshops/lecture carried out remotely. We have written to SUSI and made representations but the situation has not changed and we feel this is a funding issue that needs revision.

### 1.3.7 STUDY VISA

At present there is a difficulty that non-EEA students, who in many instances may have completed third level education in Ireland, have in securing a study visa to facilitate them undertaking the Professional Practice Courses and 24-month training contract. The Society has been in correspondence with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) since 2018 seeking that a formal visa scheme be published for trainee solicitors similar to the scheme currently available for trainee accountants. Whilst INIS has been helpful to individual visa applicants, the lack of a published scheme or indeed a response to the Society's correspondence is unfortunate, particularly where the Society wishes to assist students of all nationalities to pursue the Irish Solicitor qualification.

### 1.3.8 LEGAL PRACTICE IRISH

The Legal Practitioners (Irish Language) Act 2008 (The 2008 Act) is a manifestation of our Government's policy on bilingualism. In compliance with Article 8 of the Irish Constitution and this legislation, The Elementary Legal Practice Irish (LPI) Course was designed in 2008, as required by s. 40 (2A) of the Solicitors Act 1954 as amended by the Legal Practitioners (Irish Language) Act 2008 for all trainee solicitors taking the Professional Practice Course.

This course is compulsory for all PPC I trainees, irrespective of previous Irish language knowledge or lack thereof. The existence of an Irish language course is an improvement on having compulsory examinations but it is a barrier to would be trainees particularly those that have not come through the Irish Education System. We would support an optional Legal Practice Irish Course. The Society currently operates an Irish Language Register which provides contact details for solicitors who practise through Irish for Irish speaking clients.

## 1.4 PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE COURSE HYBRID (PPC HYBRID)

In 2019 the Law Society launched the new Professional Practice Course Hybrid which is specifically aimed at delivering a flexible route to the solicitor qualification without the traditional requirement for trainees to be onsite at Blackhall Place in Dublin for a full-time, continuous period.

Aiming to encourage greater access to legal education, the new course facilitates access for a range of people, including, for example, mature and regional students, as well as those with parental or other family commitments. When planning the PPC Hybrid, one of the main aims was to devise a programme structure that would help contribute to the Society's priority of improving the diversity of our pool of trainees and, ultimately, the diversity of the profession more generally. The PPC Hybrid is structured in such a way as to permit trainees to remain in work and makes greater use of online learning so as to reduce the requirements for onsite attendance (see below under Course Structure).

The categories of trainees identified as being likely to benefit from this more flexible route of entry into the profession included mature students, parents, carers and those from non-traditional educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The initial statistics from the first two trainee intakes onto the PPC Hybrid would indicate that the course structure has assisted with the achievement of those aims. The structure of the PPC Hybrid has also the potential to increase

our pool of possible traineeships, with that structure proving to be attractive to those offering traineeships in in-house settings. The location of such traineeships is also more regionally diverse (see below *Hybrid Trainee Profile*).

#### 1.4.1 COURSE STRUCTURE

The PPC Hybrid was originally designed in a blended learning format, to comprise onsite lectures and workshops supplemented by best practice in online learning. Trainees were to attend monthly weekend onsite sessions with lectures accessed online in recorded format. As a response to COVID-19, from April 2020 onwards the course moved to an exclusively online format. Once normality returns, the PPC Hybrid will again return to a blended learning format, but we will continue to make use of what has been learned over the course of the pandemic with regards to the viability of small group tutorials and workshops, thus improving the overall long-term accessibility of the course.

#### 1.4.2 HYBRID TRAINEE PROFILE

Statistics from the initial intake onto the PPC Hybrid in late December 2019, namely the Hybrid PPC I 2019, indicated that the course has contributed to the diversity of our trainee profile. There were 46 trainees on the Hybrid PPC I 2019. 67% of trainees were female; 56% were above the age of thirty; they were drawn from a much more diverse educational background with, in total, only 27% of trainees having attained their undergraduate degree in UCD or Trinity. The group was also much more regionally diverse with 56% of the traineeships located outside of Dublin.

The Hybrid PPC I 2020 commenced in December 2020, with 55 trainees registered for the course (a 20% increase in trainee numbers). 73% of the trainees are female; 45% are above the age of thirty; only 11% of trainees attained their undergraduate degree in UCD or Trinity.

The structure of the course would also appear to have the potential to increase the pool of possible traineeships. For example, 13% of trainees on the Hybrid PPC I 2020 have their traineeships in 'in-house' settings or Public Service Bodies (e.g. the Central Bank; Rabobank; KPMG; IHREC; Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions; Property Registration Authority). 33% of Hybrid PPC I 2020 traineeships are located outside of Dublin.

#### 1.4.3 ASSESSMENT

To ensure uniformity of standards, PPC Hybrid trainees take the same assessments as their full-time counterparts, linking in with autumn sittings for core written subjects. The Hybrid PPC I 2019 examinations took place in October 2020, with Hybrid trainees performing at least as well as their full-time counterparts.

## TRAINEE QUOTES

*“The PPC Hybrid is an answer to my prayers, as having to move to Dublin to attend the PPC would be quite difficult – not only financially, but also practically. I am a single mother from Donegal and working as a legal executive. This course will allow me to further my career while continuing to work in my locality, and be near to my family. For me, it’s opening up a horizon I never thought possible.”*

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*“The hybrid course has enabled me to finally progress and become a trainee solicitor with the flexibility of online lectures and part time weekends at Blackhall.”*

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*“I think there was a genuine effort to provide a solution for older students on the Hybrid course. Myself and many others may not have been able to attend without it.”*

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*“I am very grateful to the staff for organising the Hybrid course which gave us the opportunity to continue working full-time while studying.”*

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*“Without the hybrid my qualification in Ireland would have been impossible. Therefore I rate my overall experience as excellent.”*

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*“I definitely felt a sense of belonging to the Law School and I thought there was a lot of emphasis put on this point throughout the course”*



## 1.5 OUTREACH

The Society has been engaged in a number of initiatives to open up professional training to applications from a background of socio-economic disadvantage. As part of a broader initiative to encourage those from a diverse range of backgrounds to consider qualification as a solicitor we have undertaken a number of other programmes.

Trainee solicitors teach Transition Year (TY) students in a number of 'Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools' (DEIS) schools about law and the legal system in a practical way, while developing the skills of trainee solicitors. The schools programme runs weekly teaching sessions that take place over a period of two months. We work with the Trinity Access Pathways to Law initiative, hosting workshops for fifth and sixth year groups.

Solicitors of the Future is a week-long programme in spring, with TY students from selected schools around the country. Students learn about how the law affects them and the role of a solicitor. Places are set aside on this programme for students from DEIS schools.

In 2020 we launched our inaugural Legal Ambitions Summer School. The free Summer School is specially designed for Transition and fifth year students, encourages them to consider a career in law and offers an insight into the role of a solicitor in practice.

At such a challenging time for students and parents, the Summer School provides free, highly-engaging, online legal education. It is delivered entirely online through lectures, video interviews and presentations and cover themes such as social justice, human rights and climate change. 1500 students took part in the inaugural offering and based on the positive response we will now offer this programme every summer.

As part of proactively promoting the professional qualification of solicitor in Ireland and encouraging new applicants from a diverse range of backgrounds we hosted our inaugural Becoming a Solicitor Symposium on Thursday 20 May 2021.

Third-level students from around Ireland were invited to take part in this free online conference which provides access to video presentations, live panel discussions and Q&A sessions.

The aim of the Symposium was to increase awareness of the many flexible routes to becoming a solicitor and the scholarships and funding available to students. We are encouraging students to connect with us as they prepare for their future careers and showcase the opportunity for them to join a dynamic and rewarding profession. 500 students took part. Again due to the positive response from students and third-level institutes we will now run this symposium every year.

We are constantly working to improve access to the profession, and representation of women and diverse groups. An inclusive, diverse profession that reflects the clients we serve is one that will be more effective and successful.

## 2. THE COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH JOINING THE SOLICITOR PROFESSION.

**A breakdown of all fixed costs for qualification/admission in 2020, including: the Preliminary Examination fee, the fee per FE-1 exams; FE-1 resit fees; the PPC I; the PPC II (including hybrid) the Register of Apprentices, the Roll of Solicitors; the practising certificate mandatory fee.**

Preliminary Examination fee	€400
FE-1 Exam fee (and resit fee)	€105 per paper (8 papers in total)
Application fee to Enter into Indentures full-time PPC I and PPC Hybrid I	€840
Course Fee for full-time PPC I and PPC Hybrid I	€8300
Course fee for full-time and PPC Hybrid II	€4500
Admission to Roll of Solicitors fee	€300
Practising certificate fee for a solicitor under 3 years qualified	€2,120
Practising certificate fee for a solicitor over 3 years qualified	€2,420

### 3. THE QUALITY OF APPRENTICESHIP SELECTION PROCESSES

- including the information available to prospective trainee solicitors on training firms – and any impact this may have on the objective of increased diversity.

The two years of in-office training are a vital and essential component of the overall training to become a solicitor. Training should be with a practising solicitor who has held an Irish practising certificate for four years and holds a current practising certificate. The training solicitor is required to provide reasonable and appropriate instruction and experience in three distinct areas of legal practice. The main goal is for trainees to obtain experience in a variety of areas of law and in practice skills.

The current balance between in-office training and study at the Law School is appropriate. There is no compelling justification for either shortening or lengthening the period of the current training contract. Any shortening of the period would compromise the quality of the solicitor qualification. In 2019 the prescription of discrete blocks of practice were removed. Trainees are required to gain reasonable and appropriate experience in three out of seven broad areas of legal practice. To facilitate greater diversity in training contracts and widen the range of organisations that will be able to provide such contracts, there will be a broadening of the type of training contracts available and more opportunities for trainees. This is reflective of the changing nature of legal practice and the increasingly broad diversity of roles for solicitors.

#### 3.1 DIFFERENT MODELS OF TRAINING CONTRACTS

Different models of training contracts are being developed to improve the diversity of the training contracts provided. In this regard, the Society is examining models of training contracts to improve the availability of traineeships, such as a number of firms sharing a trainee where such firms would have difficulty funding a trainee themselves.

This measure will improve access to the profession by making it more affordable for firms to provide training contracts. This is particularly important in rural Ireland, which has seen a considerable decrease in training contracts in recent years. Facilitating additional training contracts outside large urban areas will, in time, provide opportunities in practice for those trainees and assist principals and partners in such general practices with succession planning. Such a measure will also assist in making such practices viable in the long term as they are a vital resource for many people in accessing justice in their immediate locality. Such public interest imperatives are at the core of the Society's ethos.

### 3.2. SUPPORTS FOR TRAINING CONTRACTS

The Society provides many resources to assist trainees in finding a Training Contract.

These include:

- Finding your Training Contract Seminars.
- CV and Cover Letter Workshops.
- Q&A Sessions with past trainee solicitors.
- Guides on securing a training contract in the current market.
- Digital alerts when training contract roles are advertised online.
- “Training Firm Register” which is free for organisations to join in order to advertise the fact that they are interested in hiring trainee solicitors.

The Society launched a new €125,000 grant scheme to boost solicitor traineeship opportunities in practices outside the main urban districts.

Now in its second year, five grants of €25,000 each will be awarded to assist with the cost of employing a trainee over a two-year period.

The grant can make a real difference to a rural practice’s ability to continue to provide a much-needed service to the rural and farming community.

The Society did an analysis of training contracts in the system and, at the time it was undertaken, we established that around 84pc of training firms were in Dublin. Over a three-year average a number of counties had no training contracts; plus, quite a few that had less than two training contracts in three years. That is of concern because if you don’t have trainees in provincial Ireland then, inevitably, there is going to be issues in the medium-long term where there would be less solicitors available in rural Ireland to meet the need of the population. There is no imminent crisis in the provision of legal services, but the Society’s aim is to get ahead of a potential situation where people would have to travel to avail of legal services.

To be applicable for the grant, candidates must have passed all eight FE1 exams and the proposed training contract firm should be located outside Dublin city and county, and the urban districts of Cork, Limerick and Galway. The small firm must consist of five or fewer solicitors and agree to pay the trainee the living wage (€12.30/hr).

Read the latest Gazette to hear from trainee Donna Ferry on her experience:  
<https://www.lawsociety.ie/gazette/in-depth/small-practice-traineeship-grant/>

## 4. THE AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF “ON-THE-JOB” MANDATORY APPRENTICE TRAINING FOR SOLICITORS.

This includes “terms and conditions,” remuneration, arrangements for supervision and oversight, support and evaluation, and any impact the existing availability and quality of this training/experience may have on access and diversity.

The in-office training period facilitates the trainee solicitor with on the job training. This period is crucial in allowing the trainee solicitor to practice the legal skills and knowledge that they have acquired during the Professional Practice Course. The training contract requires that trainee solicitors are provided with in-office experience in both contentious and non-contentious legal matters.

### 4.1 SUPERVISION

The in-office training period is monitored by the Society via office visits from the Traineeship Executive. Each year 10% of the training firms are visited annually by the Training Executive.

In advance of the office visits, the trainee solicitors selected for an office visit are sent a comprehensive questionnaire seeking details of the work completed to-date broken down by legal area.

Information is also sought in respect of the supervision and training received by the trainee solicitor from their training solicitor. Also information is requested in respect of the trainee solicitor’s working environment.

The office visits allow the Society to:

- Monitor the in-office training period for individual trainee solicitors
- Obtain feedback in respect of the Professional Practice Course and the in-office training in terms of quality and breadth of experience
- Build long term relationships with training firms
- Provide support and encouragement to trainee solicitors and their training solicitors
- Trainee solicitors are provided with practical advice e.g. work flow and task/time management
- Address any issues that they may arise during the in-office training period

The office visits typically last one hour including a discussion in respect of the questionnaire completed by the trainee solicitors in advance of the visit. In most cases, the Traineeship Executive will meet with both trainee solicitor and their training solicitors, usually separately.

## 4.2 AVAILABILITY OF TRAINING CONTRACTS

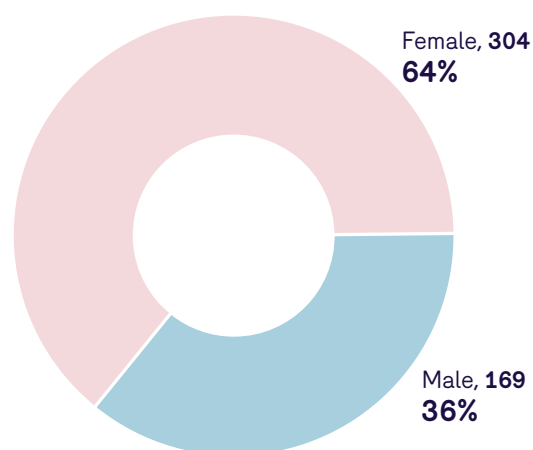
The availability of solicitor training contracts in Ireland is market driven and as a result the Society does not impose any cap on the number of trainee solicitors who may attend the Professional Practice Courses.

From looking at PPC figures for 2020, it is clear that there continues to be a significant number of training contracts available.

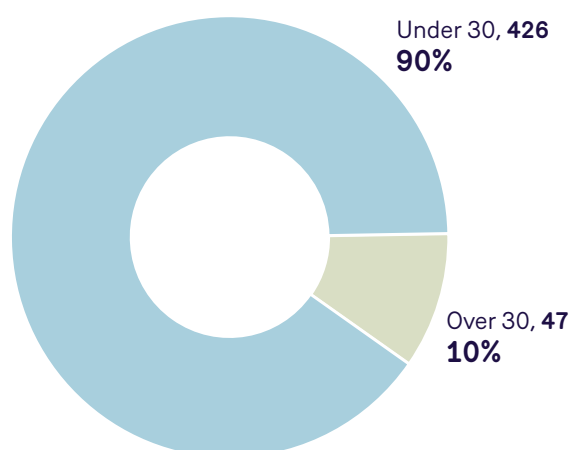
### Training Contracts from 2016 to 2020

PPC   Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total Trainees	403	412	448	455	473

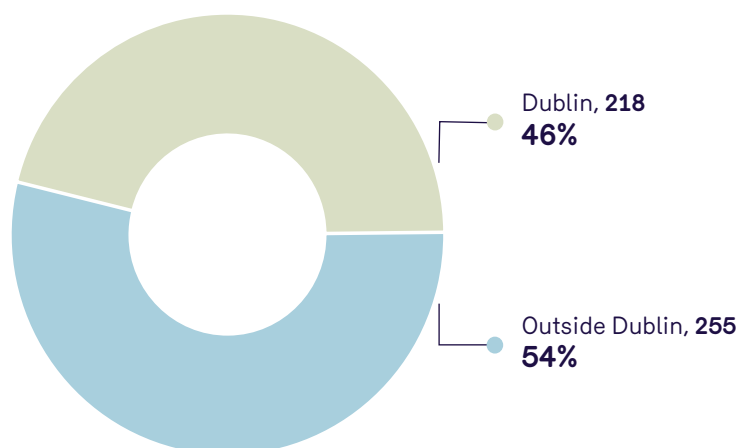
#### APPLICANTS PPC 2020



#### AGE PROFILE PPC TRAINEES



#### HOME LOCATIONS PPC TRAINEES

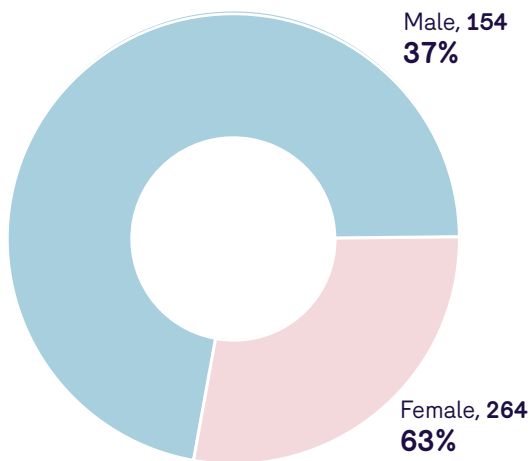


## SEPTEMBER 2020 PPC

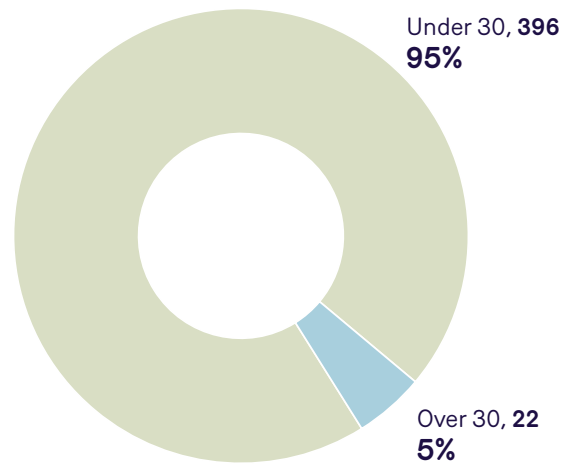
There are currently 418 trainees attending the full-time 2020 PPC I which commenced on 8 September 2020. 63% of the trainees are female: 5% are above the age of thirty.

BREAKDOWN DEMOGRAPHIC PPC I FULL-TIME 2020									
Male	Female	Under 30	Over 30	Law degree	Other degree	No degree	Dublin	Outside Dublin	Total
154	264	396	22	346	67	5	200	218	418

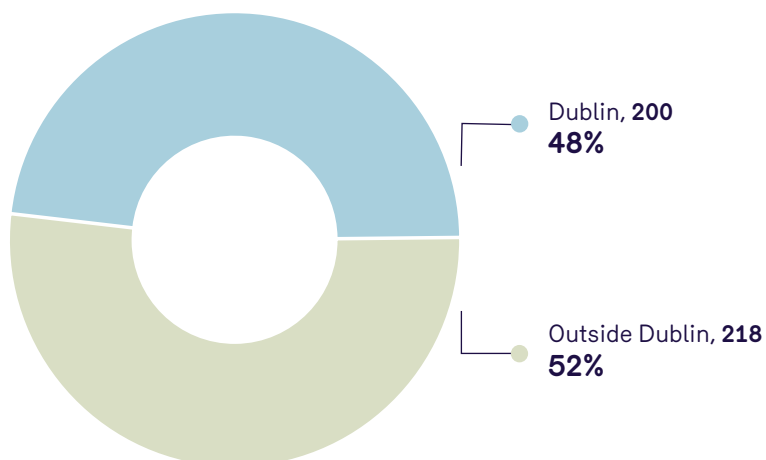
### APPLICANTS PPC I FULL-TIME 2020



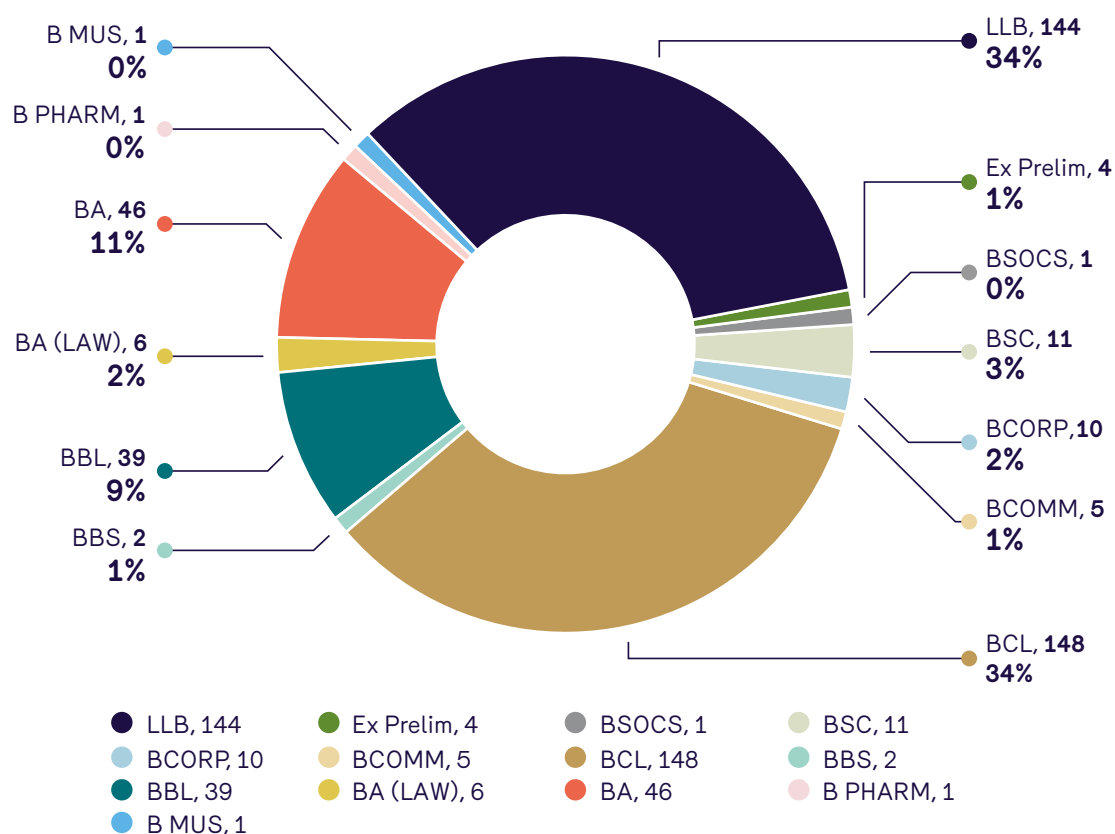
### AGE PROFILE PPC I FULL-TIME TRAINEES



### HOME LOCATION PPC I FULL-TIME TRAINEES



## ACADEMIC BACKGROUND PPC APPLICANTS (FULL-TIME COURSE)

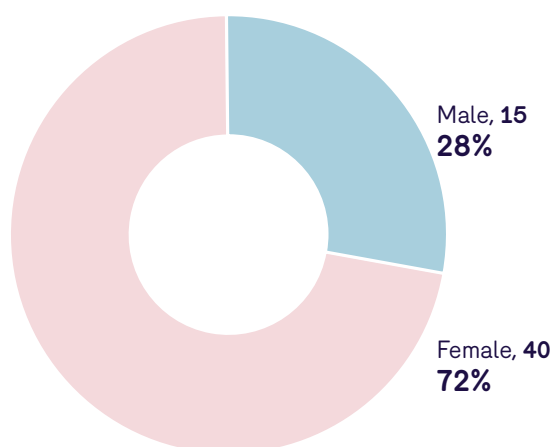


## DECEMBER 2020 PPC I (HYBRID)

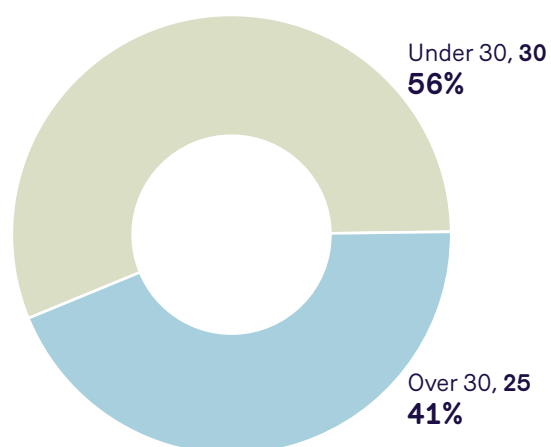
BREAKDOWN OF DEMOGRAPHIC PPC I HYBRID 2020									
Male	Female	Under 30	Over 30	Law degree	Other degree	No degree	Dublin	Outside Dublin	Total
15	40	30	25	40	12	3	18	37	55

The *Hybrid PPC I 2020* commenced in December 2020, with 55 trainees registered for the course. 72% of the trainees are female; 44% are above the age of thirty; only 11% of trainees attained their undergraduate degree in UCD or Trinity. 33% of *Hybrid PPC I 2020* traineeships are located outside of Dublin. Some 15% of trainees have their traineeships in what can be described as ‘in-house’ settings or Public Service Bodies for example The Central Bank of Ireland; Rabobank; KPMG; IHREC; Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and Property Registration Authority. There are very few in-house trainees attending the full time PPC I.

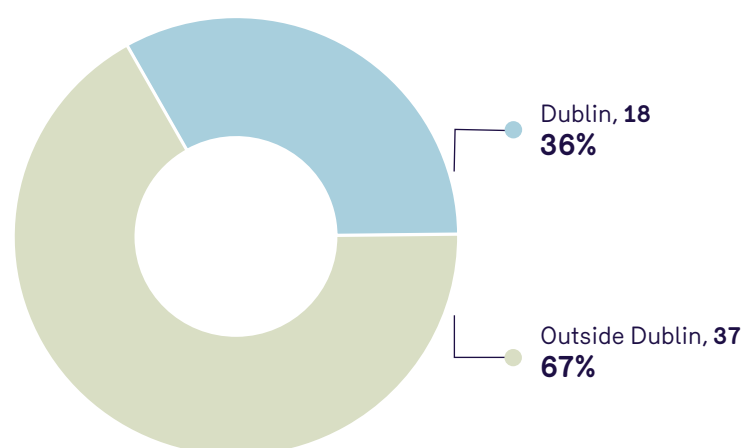
APPLICANTS PPC HYBRID 2020



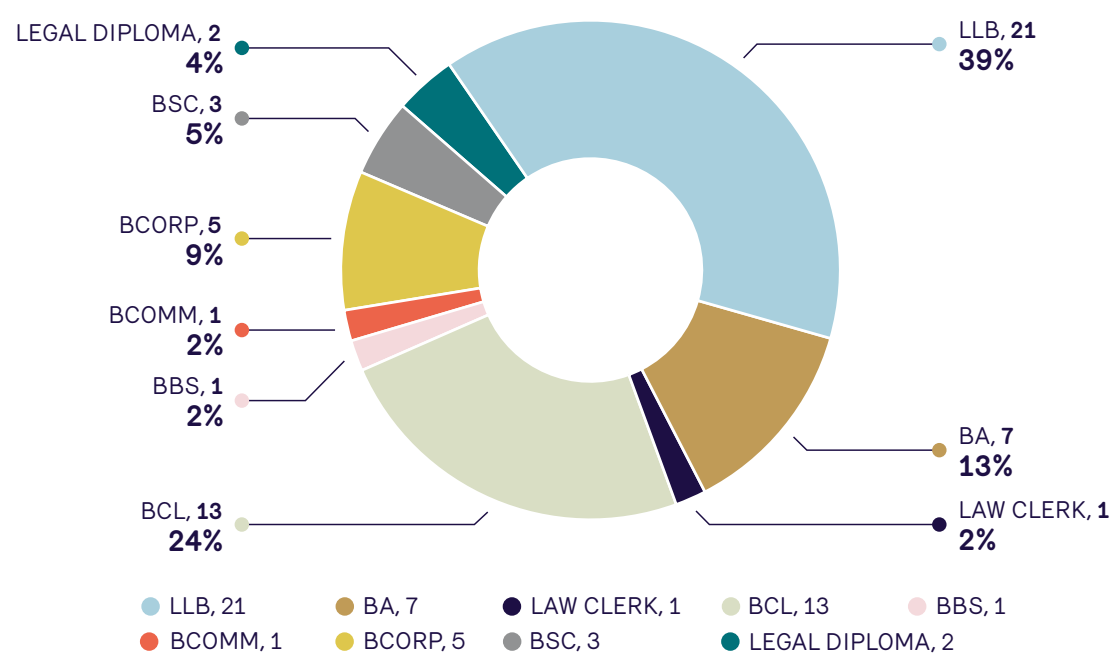
AGE PROFILE HYBRID TRAINEES



HOME LOCATION HYBRID TRAINEES



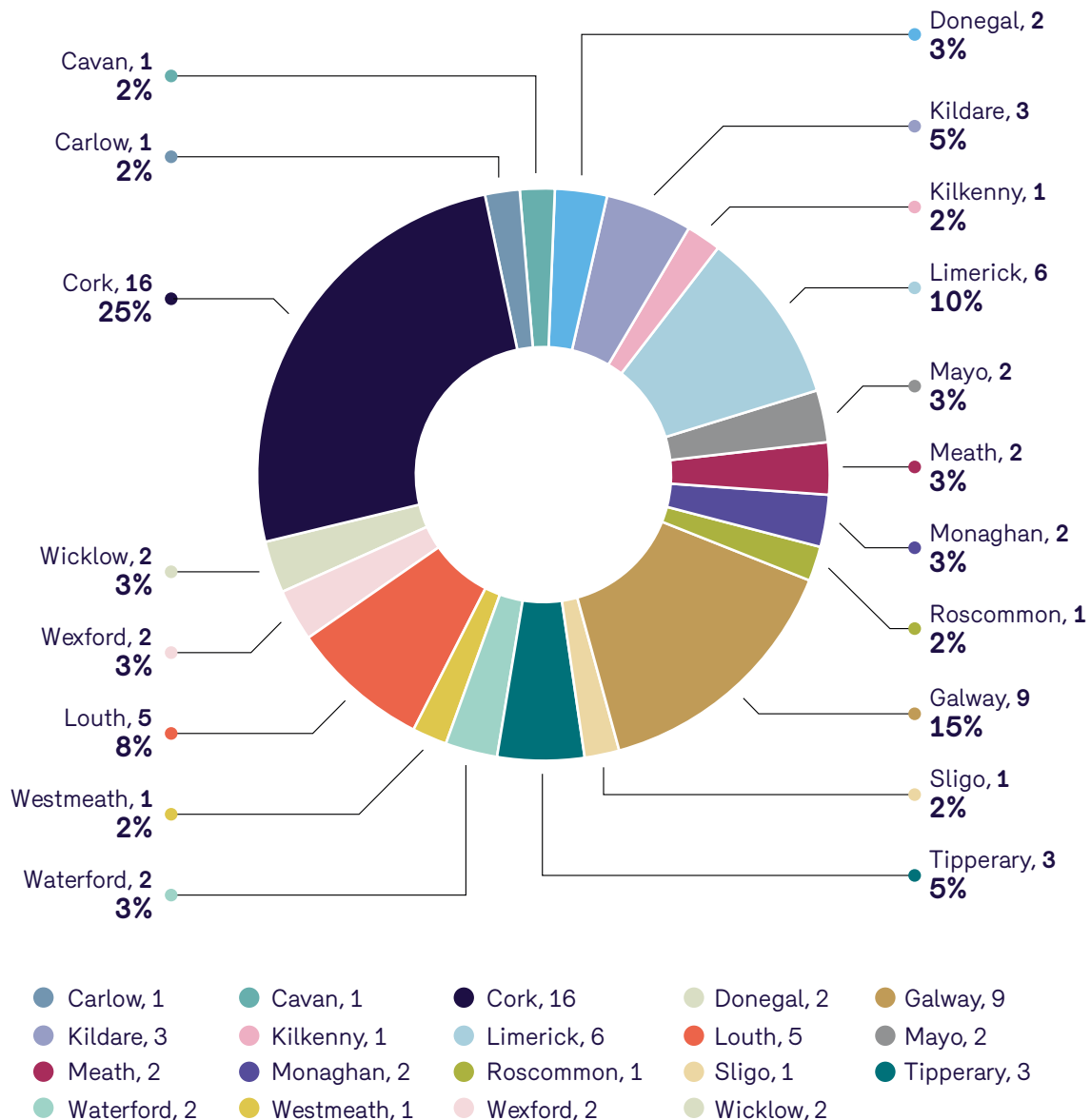
ACADEMIC BACKGROUND HYBRID APPLICANTS



**A county (and Dublin city) breakdown of the geographical location of training firms for 2020 PPC course trainees, with separate stats for the full-time and hybrid PPC courses.**

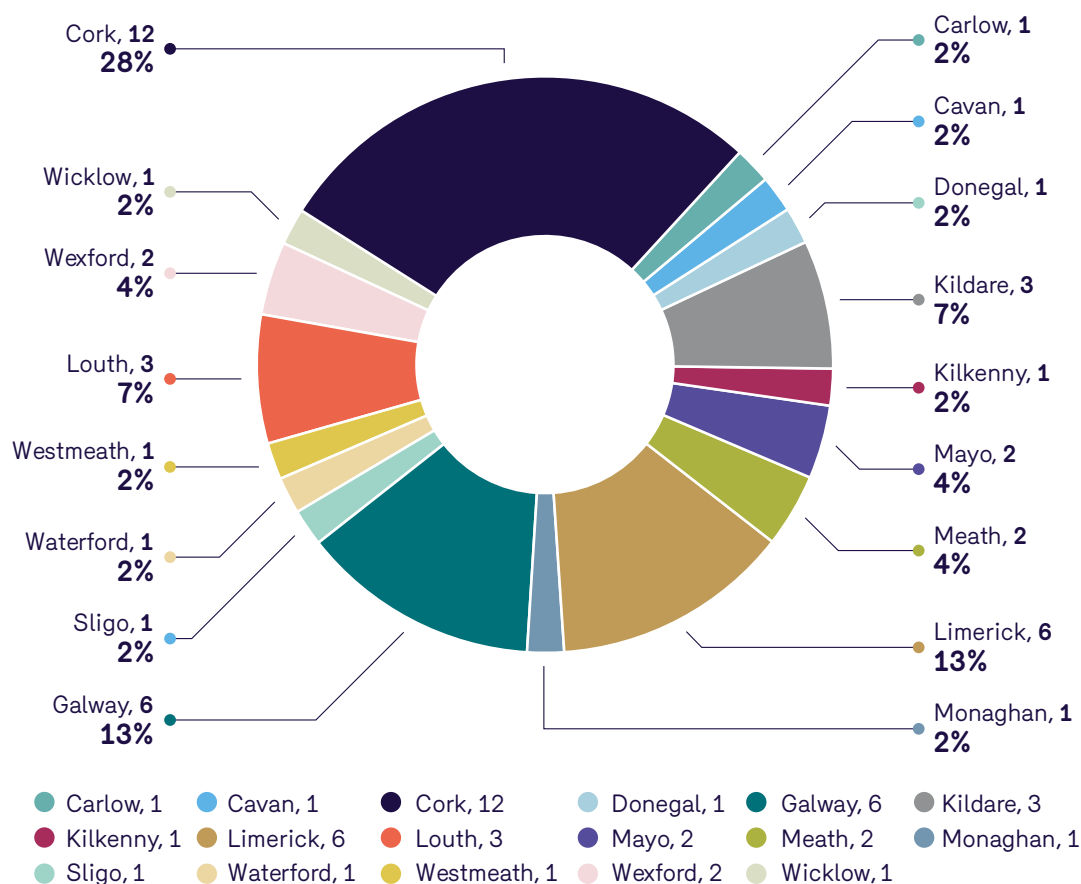
For the 2020 PPC there are currently 409 traineeships in Dublin with 63 traineeships in the rest of the country. Below is a breakdown of those counties. While many of the 409 traineeships in Dublin are with commercial firms, there are also many with general practice firms, State bodies, in-house and specialist firms practicing in criminal litigation.

**COUNTY OF TRAINEESHIP PPC 2020**

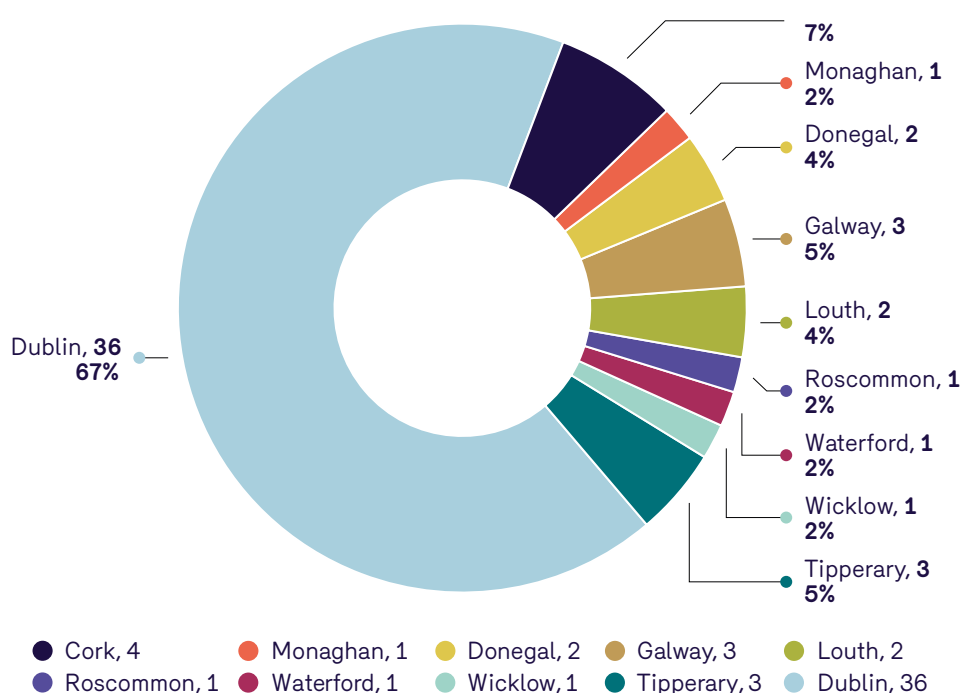


PPC I (Full-time) has 373 Traineeships in Dublin with 45 traineeships in the rest of the country. The PPC Hybrid has 36 traineeships in Dublin with 18 traineeships in the rest of the country. Below is a breakdown of those counties.

#### COUNTY OF TRAINEESHIP PPC I FULL-TIME



#### COUNTY OF TRAINEESHIP HYBRID 2020



Trainees have the choice of working in large, medium or small sized practices. They are also permitted to train in-house, e.g. insurance companies, banks, tech companies, County Councils, Revenue Commissioners, Chief State Solicitor's Office, aircraft leasing companies, law centres, financial services companies, e-commerce companies and An Garda Siochana Legal Department.

In accordance with the terms of the indentures of apprenticeship (training contract), the training solicitor specifically undertakes to provide their trainee solicitor with adequate in-office training and experience in three distinct areas of law. The training solicitor also undertakes to supervise their trainee solicitor and to provide regular feedback and address any areas of concern that the trainee solicitor may have. The training solicitor is also required at regular intervals to complete a statutory declaration confirming the training provided to the trainee solicitor. Training contracts are supervised by the Society with the Traineeship Executive visiting approximately 45 training firms around the country each year in order to ensure that trainee solicitors were receiving adequate training and to address any concerns arising.

The Society's Traineeship Executive acts as a point of contact for both training solicitors and trainee solicitors. Where a difficulty arises with a particular training contract, the matter may be referred to the Law Society Education Committee for their direction.



## 5. THE EXTENT TO WHICH EXISTING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE REMUNERATION OF TRAINEE SOLICITORS DURING THEIR IN-OFFICE TRAINING POSES A BARRIER IN TERMS OF EQUITY OF ACCESS TO AND DIVERSITY WITHIN THE SOLICITOR PROFESSION

In accordance with the Minimum Wage Act, trainee solicitors must be paid at least the minimum wage by their training firms whilst completing the twenty-four month in-office training period.

The Law Society Education Committee has made a non-binding recommendation that training solicitors consider paying their trainee solicitors a minimum of the “living wage” as opposed to the minimum wage. Since the recommendation was made in 2019, some training firms including firms based outside of Dublin have adopted the recommendation.

Where a trainee solicitor has worked for a training firm immediately prior to their commencement on the PPC and it is the trainees intention to immediately return to the training firm to undertake their in-office training once they have completed the PPC, under the Minimum Wage Act, the training firm is obligated to pay the trainee solicitor whilst attending the course.

### THE “LIVING WAGE”

The Education Committee of the Law Society of Ireland, whilst recognising that it exceeds the minimum statutory wage under the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 (“NMWA 2000”, see below), recommends that a training solicitor gives consideration to paying his or her trainee solicitor the higher non-statutory “living wage” published from time to time by the Vincentian Partnership, as found and defined on its website ([www.livingwage.ie](http://www.livingwage.ie)).<sup>1</sup>

The current “living wage” hourly rate is €12.30 per hour and therefore, based on the recommended 36 hour work week, represents a weekly salary of €442.80.

### STATUTORY MINIMUM WAGE / SALARY

A training solicitor is obliged to pay his/her trainee solicitor a minimum salary under the terms of the NMWA 2000. From 1 January 2021, the statutory national minimum wage for an experienced adult employee is €10.20 per hour (the “Statutory Wage”). An experienced adult employee, for the purposes of the NMWA 2000 is an employee who has had employment of any kind in any two years over the age of 18.

#### (i) Pre-Professional Practice Course I (“PPC I”)

A trainee solicitor who works in his/her training solicitor’s office prior to starting the PPC I must be paid a salary of at least the Statutory Wage. This is €367.20 per week based on the Education Committee’s recommendation of a 36 hour work week. Four months can be credited against the duration of the two-year training period for a trainee who works in the training solicitor’s (or another practicing solicitor’s) office before commencing on the PPC I.

<sup>1</sup> Proposed by the Education Committee (6th December 2018)

### (i) During the PPC I

A trainee solicitor who works in his/her training solicitor's office before commencing on the PPC I, is, in accordance with the NWMA 2000, entitled to be paid a salary while on the PPC I. The salary for such a trainee while on the PPC I is €306.00 per week based on a course week of 30 hours.

However, where a training solicitor agrees to pay the PPC I course fees on behalf of the trainee solicitor, a reduction may be applied, as per the table below:

#### Where the PPC I course fees are paid by the training solicitor

75% of minimum wage (€7.65 per hour) for first third of the course (9 weeks)	€7.65 x 30 hours = €229.50 per week
80% of minimum wage (€8.16 per hour) for the second third of the course (10 weeks)	€8.16 x 30 hours = €244.80 per week
90% of minimum wage (€9.18 per hour) for the final portion of the course (10 weeks)	€9.18 x 30 hours = €275.40 per week

### (iii) During the two year in-office training period

A trainee solicitor must be paid a salary of at least the Statutory Wage during his/her two year in-office training period. This is €367.20 per week based on the Education Committee's recommendation of a 36 hour work week. This is €1,591.19 per month or €19,094.28 per annum. Hours worked in excess of 36 hours per week must also be paid at least the Statutory Wage.

### (iv) During the Professional Practice Course II ("PPC II")

A trainee solicitor, while on the PPC II, is entitled to be paid €265.20 per week based on a course week of 26 hours.

However, where a training solicitor agrees to pay the PPC II course fees on behalf of the trainee solicitor, a reduction may be applied, as per the table below:

Where the PPC II course fees are paid by the training solicitor

75% of minimum wage (€7.65 per hour) for first third of the course ( 4 weeks )	€7.65 x 26 hours = €198.90 per week
80% of minimum wage (€8.16 per hour) for the second third of the course (4 weeks)	€8.16 x 26 hours = €212.16 per week
90% of minimum wage (€9.18 per hour) for the final portion of the course (4 weeks)	€9.18 x 26 hours = €238.68 per week

### (v) Post-PPC II

After completion of the PPC II, the entitlement of the trainee solicitor continues to be that he/she must be paid the Statutory Wage.

### **(vi) Enforcement**

A trainee solicitor, who is not satisfied that he/she is being paid the Statutory Wage is entitled to make a complaint<sup>2</sup> to the Workplace Relations Commission.

The NWMA 2000 provides for the imposition of criminal sanctions on an employer who is found to have failed to pay an employee the Statutory Wage.

For further information on the statutory national minimum wage see the detailed guide to the National Minimum Wage Act 2000 (pdf) or contact the Workplace Relations Commission - Customer Services.

Workplace Relations Commission - Customer Services, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, O'Brien Road, Carlow. Opening Hours: Mon. to Fri. 9.30am to 5pm

Tel: (059) 917 8990. Locall: 1890 80 80 90.

Homepage: <http://www.workplacerelements.ie/>

### **Useful contact**

Workplace Relations Commission,  
O'Brien Road, Carlow. R93 W7W2  
Ph: (059) 91 78990  
Lo-Call 1890 80 80 90  
Fax: (059) 91 78909

The free market determines what salary the training firm is willing to pay to a trainee solicitor. In Dublin there is significant competition amongst small, medium and large firms to recruit trainee solicitors and salaries in Dublin therefore would be higher than the rest of the country for trainee solicitors. Salaries in the large training firms are in the range of €40,000 - €45,000 per annum. Medium sized firms pay their trainee solicitors in the region of €28,000 per annum with smaller firms paying less, circa €22,000 - €25,000 per annum. Outside of Dublin, trainee solicitors may be earning circa €18,500 - €25,000 per annum if employed in private practice. Individual trainee solicitors working in-house may receive a higher salary than those quoted for private practice firms outside of Dublin.

Salaries are higher in Dublin for trainee solicitors however trainee solicitor may find a general practice training contract outside of Dublin to be very advantageous to them in terms of the breadth of experience they will gain over the course of the in-office training period. There may also be a better work/life balance compared to working as a trainee solicitor in a large Dublin based firm.

The Society's objective is to encourage as many firms as possible to provide training opportunities for trainee solicitors. The introduction of the Hybrid Professional Practice Course has made it easier for students from outside of Dublin and those individuals with young families to combine working with study in order to progress to qualification as a solicitor. This method of training also facilitates those individuals who may not be able to give up working for six months to attend the full-time Professional Practice Course. As discussed in the section above the Small Practice Traineeship Grant which was introduced in 2020.

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<sup>2</sup> Where a complaint is contemplated, reference should be made to the detailed provisions of the NMWA 2000 (as amended by the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act 2010) and relevant statutory regulations.

## 6. THE ARRANGEMENTS IN PLACE AND PROVISION FOR MATERNITY/ADOPTIVE LEAVE FOR SOLICITORS AND BARRISTERS AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH AVAILING OF SUCH LEAVE MAY HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREER PROGRESSION.

Trainee Solicitors may take statutory maternity adoptive leave including extended leave during their in-office training period. The Society grants a maternity/adoptive leave dispensation of 18 weeks to trainee solicitors who wish to avail of same. These provide the trainee solicitor credit of 18 weeks as against the 24-month in-office training period. If a trainee solicitor wishes to take an extended maternity/adoptive leave, whilst they will obtain credit through the aforementioned dispensation for 18 weeks, their qualification date will be delayed pro-rata based on how many weeks leave they take beyond the 18-week period. It is a matter for the trainee solicitor to decide as to whether they wish to attend or defer attendance on the Professional Practice Courses due to maternity leave.



7. (a) The key economic and other challenges for early career solicitors (up to seven years post-qualification experience) in maintaining and building their careers in the professions, and their impact in terms of the objective of achieving greater diversity within the professions.

(b) Proposals on how these key economic and other challenges for early career solicitors may be addressed, and by whom, in order to achieve greater diversity within the professions.

### 7.1 MEMBERSHIP OF THE LAW SOCIETY

Newly qualified solicitors do face barriers when starting their professional careers including the time commitment commanded by some firms, issues around gender and it can be difficult for young female solicitors to juggle starting a family with their careers. Newly qualified solicitors are free to establish their own firms and for many this may be a challenge. All that said newly qualified solicitors are very much in demand and wages are very good. Some younger solicitors are qualifying in other jurisdictions in order to progress their careers in new directions.

Membership of the Law Society has many benefits, including:

- Access to a vast legal library including lending, enquiries, databases and other services from the Society's Library.
- Access to the Professional Wellbeing Hub.
- Job opportunity updates, reduced prices for job advertisements and expert advice from the Society's Careers Service
- Practice Advisory Service contracted to OutSource to provide a confidential practice advisory service to solicitors' firms.
- Access to guidance from senior practitioners on the Women in Leadership Mentoring Programme.

The Society's Younger Members Committee explore and promote issues affecting members of the profession across the country who are qualified for less than seven years. The Committee aims to help younger members achieve their full potential through a series of online career information sessions in collaboration with the Society's Career Support Team.

### 7.2 WOMEN IN THE PROFESSION

In 2014 the Society became the first legal profession in the world to have a female majority with 52% of our members being women. This year the Society celebrated International Women's Day with a call for renewed collective efforts to increase access to leadership roles for women in the legal sector.

The law has a monumental impact on our daily lives, directly and indirectly. It is widely recognised that when women are more involved in decision-making, not only does business flourish but society benefits greatly. One of the best ways to progress equality is to use the lived experience of women across the profession to empower the next generation of legal leaders. Since 2016, the

Society has run its Women in Leadership Mentoring Programme to help more women in the profession in building their careers. To date, 118 successful solicitor mentorship pairs have been created.

The mentors are often women in very senior roles from the public and private sectors, helping women to move up the career ladder. It is an opportunity for mentors to provide support and insights, and also acknowledge their own vulnerabilities, while mentees can achieve clarity and confidence in their work, as well as guidance on how to grow their careers.

### 7.3 GENDER EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CHARTER

In 2019 the Society launched a new task force to promote gender equality, diversity and inclusion in the Society and the solicitors' profession.

The Task Force comprises 16 members from various minority, disability, LGBT+ and socio-economic backgrounds. The task force make recommendations to encourage more female solicitors, and solicitors from diverse backgrounds, to seek leadership roles on the Law Society's Council and committees.

The task force also created useful tools that solicitors can use to help achieve equality, diversity and inclusion within their firms.

Firms, in-house and public sector legal teams are invited to join the Society in pledging their names to the Law Society Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Charter and to avail of useful diversity and inclusion resources.

The signatories to this Charter will commit to treat all individuals and groups of individuals fairly and equally and no less favourably, specific to their needs, in areas of gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, class, disability or membership of the Traveller Community. As such, signatories will:

- Recognise the individual needs of those they employ and support them to develop to their full potential.
- Ensure equal access to opportunities for those they employ.
- Ensure their policies, procedures and processes promote gender equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Carry out their work without bias, in a respectful and non-discriminatory manner.
- Build awareness and understanding of the benefits of promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Assign responsibility for meeting the Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Charter commitments to a named senior partner or member of staff.

### 7.4 TRANSFERS TO THE BAR

At present, Irish barristers who have practised for at least three years and can provide evidence of their qualifications, a CV, references from two benchers and an academic reference may, on condition of first being voluntarily disbarred, become solicitors by undertaking the non-examined one month Essentials of Legal Practice course.

They may also have to undertake a 6-month period of supervised practice in a solicitor's office although this requirement can be waived in some circumstances.

Irish solicitors who have practised for at least three years and can provide evidence of their voluntary removal from the Roll, a statutory declaration that he or she retains no financial interest in a solicitors' practice, certificates of good standing and an undertaking to keep two terms of commons in the first two years of practice, may be admitted to the Bar provided they also complete the non-examined four-week solicitors transfer course.

The Society wishes to explore granting a level of recognition to barristers qualified less than three years with reciprocal terms offered for solicitors qualified less than three years. We have proposed this to the Honourable Society of King's Inns on reciprocity for such a measure. Barristers and Solicitors are extremely well qualified lawyers. There should be a framework in place for even partial mutual recognition for those who wish to transfer from one branch to another.

## 7.5 DIGNITY MATTERS SURVEY

In a bid to tackle oppressive workplace cultures, the Society is carrying out an independent research study on bullying, sexual, and other forms of harassment in the solicitors' profession.

A confidential survey is being carried out with the help of external consultants Crowe, following ethical research guidelines, with the goal of providing an objective assessment of the current work environment as it relates to these matters.

Law Society members, both practising and non-practising, as well as Blackhall Place trainees, have been invited by Crowe via email to participate in this survey.

The goal of the Dignity Matters project is to help transform workplace culture.





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