

Breaking Down Barriers

Implementation Plan



Progress Report 1

March 2025



An tÚdarás Rialála
Seirbhíse Dlí

Legal Services
Regulatory Authority

Update from Dr Brian Doherty, CEO Legal Services Regulatory Authority

Chair of Breaking Down Barriers Implementation Working Group

I am pleased to introduce this progress update on the implementation of the LSRA's recommendations to address economic and other barriers facing many aspiring and early career solicitors and barristers.

The LSRA began examining these barriers following a request from the then Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee TD, who asked the Authority to pay particular attention to equity of access and entry to the legal professions, and the objective of achieving greater diversity.

The LSRA brought forward a total of 32 recommendations in its final *Breaking Down Barriers* report submitted to the Minister in January 2024. The Minister welcomed these as “meaningful reforms that will make a real difference.” In order to track impact, she asked the LSRA to prepare an implementation plan with progress indicators, timelines and six-monthly progress reports.

The LSRA submitted its *Breaking Down Barriers* Implementation Plan in September 2024 and it was noted by government and published in October 2024. The plan sets out tasks and timelines for the delivery of the LSRA's wide-ranging reform proposals over the implementation period which runs until the end of 2026.

This is the LSRA's first progress report on the Breaking Down Barriers Implementation Plan, covering the six month period from October 2024 to March 2025. It is submitted to the Department of Justice.

This update documents the significant work that has been carried out by the LSRA and our key stakeholders in advancing the reform agenda to widen and increase access to education, training and early career opportunities, and to enhance diversity in the legal professions. This includes the establishment of a *Breaking Down Barriers* Implementation Working Group which I am pleased to chair.

I want to sincerely thank the LSRA's stakeholders for their enthusiasm in delivering on the *Breaking Down Barriers* recommendations. Particular thanks go to the three professional bodies – the Law Society of Ireland, the Honorable Society of King's Inn and The Bar of Ireland. I look forward to continued engagement with all stakeholders in the coming months as we work to build a more inclusive and diverse legal services sector.

Dr Brian J Doherty,
31 March 2025



Barriers Implementation Working Group Up and Running

The *Breaking Down Barriers* Implementation Working Group (IWG) is the primary mechanism to progress the recommendations set out in the LSRA's implementation plan.

The group is chaired by the LSRA's Chief Executive, Dr Brian Doherty. Its membership includes nominated representatives of the professional bodies for solicitors and barristers. The professional bodies are:

- the Law Society of Ireland (Law Society)
- the Honorable Society of King's Inns (King's Inns)
- The Bar of Ireland (Bar Council)

The IWG will ensure the timely progression of the majority of the 32 *Breaking Down Barriers* recommendations.

At its first meeting, members discussed a total of 12 recommendations with implementation tasks due for the final quarter of 2024 and the first quarter of 2025. Group members agreed a range of practical actions and areas for input and consideration.

The IWG will meet on a quarterly basis with the next meeting scheduled for 3 April 2025 at the premises of The Bar of Ireland.



At the first meeting of the *Breaking Down Barriers* Implementation Working Group at the LSRA's premises in Manor Street, Dublin were (L-R): Dr Eimear Brown, Dean of School of Law, the Honorable Society of King's Inn; Dr Brian Doherty, CEO, LSRA; Rory O'Boyle, Diploma Co-ordinator, Law Society of Ireland; Stephen Swanton, Director of Education and Professional Development, The Bar of Ireland; Ciara Murphy, CEO, The Bar of Ireland. Also in attendance from the LSRA were Nuala Haughey, Head of the Communications, Research and Innovation Department; Sarah Winston, Research Manager; and Rebecca Wolfe, Administrator.

Education and Training Committee Established to Drive Reforms

The *Breaking Down Barriers* project builds upon foundations laid down in the LSRA's earlier work in examining legal practitioner education and training and bringing forward recommendations for structural reform.

An intensive period of research and stakeholder consultations began in 2018 and culminated in a LSRA report to the then Minister for Justice in November 2020. *Setting Standards - Legal Professional Education and Training* made a total of 14 recommendations for reform. Two core recommendations in *Setting Standards* were:

- The development of a clear definition of the competence and standards required to practise as a solicitor or barrister.
- The establishment of a new independent body to drive reform in the legal practitioner education and training arena, called the Legal Practitioners Education and Training Committee, or LPET. The LPET Committee, which will require primary legislation, will both set and assure educational and training standards and accredit new and existing legal education and training providers.

Several of the recommendations in *Breaking Down Barriers* relate to legal practitioner education and training. Anticipating the future establishment of the LPET Committee, these recommendations identify priority areas for its work agenda.

The LSRA (the Authority) has taken a series of steps towards setting up the LPET Committee, including:

- An Education and Training Committee of the Authority has been established under section 16 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015. Its role is to lay the foundations and build the framework for the LEPT Committee.
- Three members of the S16 Education and Training Committee (E&T) were appointed by the Authority in late 2024, including Dr Don Thornhill as chairperson. Dr Thornhill is the former chair of the Authority.
- A further four members of the S16 E&T Committee were appointed by the Authority in March 2025, following an open competition.
- The S16 E&T will hold its inaugural meeting on 16 April 2025.

A key priority of the Authority's S16 E&T Committee is to oversee the development of a national Competency Framework to define the competencies required of solicitors and barristers and the standards to which these should be demonstrated.

The LSRA commends the professional bodies for solicitors and barristers for the considerable work they have already undertaken in the area of professional competencies. Since *Setting Standards* was published in November 2020, the Law Society, the King's Inns and The Bar of Ireland have each produced their own Competency Frameworks.

The S16 E&T Committee will play an important role in assisting the Authority with the delivery of the *Breaking Down Barriers* Implementation Plan. It is working towards completion of its challenging programme of work within fifteen months.



Breaking Down Barriers

Implementation Plan Progress Report 1, March 2025

Breaking Down Barriers contains a total of 32 recommendations which contain 80 individual actions for implementation over the lifetime of the plan.

This update documents progress towards 12 recommendations, comprising 17 implementation actions that were due for completion in Q4 2024 and Q 1 2025. Further details are contained in the table on page 9.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PATHWAYS

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Increase flexible training routes and reporting

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The Law Society and the King's Inns have for the first time reported to the LSRA in detail on their existing flexible training routes for legal practitioner training and the impact of these. Full information on these will be provided in the LSRA's forthcoming *Pathways to the Professions Annual Report 2025*. The collection of this data using the Pathways annual report as a template provides a baseline against which future progress can be charted. In addition to existing initiatives:

- The Law Society is examining a solicitor apprenticeship model as a new route to qualification for school leavers, targeted at students from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage. This new model of training will include what the Law Society calls a number of 'off-ramp' qualification points for learners prior to full qualification, such as a standalone legal executive qualification which it plans to launch in 2025.
- For 2025, all practising solicitors were requested to contribute €15 towards further Law Society professional access programmes through their Practising Certificate fee. The programme will develop initiatives to reduce barriers for those seeking to enter, return to, or progress within the solicitors' profession.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Annual reporting on diversity of students and trainees

PROGRESS UPDATE:

Following a competitive procurement process, the LSRA in March 2025 appointed diversity experts the Bridge Group to advise on the collection of diversity data on student barristers and trainee solicitors.

The Bridge Group will engage with the training providers, the Law Society for solicitors and the King's Inns for barristers. It will complete its expert report by the end of May 2025, so that the planned collection of diversity data can commence in 2025 for the new student barrister and trainee solicitor intake.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PATHWAYS

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Explore levy and other funding for financial supports for diversity

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The LSRA has invited the professional bodies to share their views on potential funding mechanisms and appropriate financial supports for prospective solicitors and barristers to increase diversity of intake.

The LSRA will carefully analyse the responses and intends to run a consultation with the legal professions and other key stakeholders in Q2 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Review mandatory requirement of pupillage in King's Inns Code

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The LSRA has invited the King's Inns and Bar of Ireland to set out their views on the impact of the removal or retention of the mandatory requirement in the King's Inns Code of Conduct that barristers undertake nine months' unpaid pupillage before they can represent clients before courts.

The LSRA will engage on this issue with the Authority's S16 Education and Training Committee at its inaugural meeting on 16 April 2025.

SOLICITOR TRAINEESHIPS

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Solicitor traineeships in civil and public service

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The Law Society has outlined to the LSRA work it has already undertaken to encourage and support direct intake of trainee solicitors in the public and private sectors and also the new initiatives it will commence in 2025. These include:

- Since its introduction in 2019, its part-time solicitor training programme, the Professional Practice Course (PPC) Hybrid, has facilitated a cohort of trainees who are more demographically diverse than their full-time counterparts in terms of their age, family and caring commitments, educational backgrounds and geographical locations. Part-time trainees can stay in work while completing the programme. In 2024, 11% of PPC Hybrid traineeships were in the in-house and public sector compared to 3% of full-time PPC trainees.
- The PPC (Hybrid) will be further restructured to enable part-time trainees to access training over a longer timeframe.
- In 2024, the Law Society published a new information guide for in-house and public sector employers called “Hiring a Trainee.”
- In 2025, the Law Society will engage with in-house and public sector bodies who have offered solicitor training contracts to ensure the PPC continues to meet the needs of such organisations. It also intends to identify further potential in-house and public sector training contract providers and invite them to information sessions in to highlight the benefits of hiring trainee solicitors.

INFORMATION ON CAREER PATHWAYS AND OPPORTUNITIES

RECOMMENDATION 17:

More information to highlight different career pathways

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The LSRA has engaged with the King’s Inns and Law Society on this recommendation and is in the process of undertaking a stakeholder analysis to identify the relevant private and public sector employers for highlighting different career pathways.

As part of the successful introduction of legal partnerships as a new business model for legal services providers, the LSRA ran a multi-channel information campaign for solicitors and barristers in quarter 4 2024.

This campaign featured a new dedicated section on the LSRA website with detailed FAQs, targeted advertisements on LinkedIn, and editorial coverage and advertising in the legal publications the Law Society Gazette, Gazette.ie, and the Irish Legal News.

The LSRA commissioned Ipsos/B&A to survey 200 solicitors to gather their views on legal partnerships. In person information events were held for barrister students at the King’s Inn’s and for solicitors at the Dublin Solicitors’ Bar Association. The LSRA also hosted a live online webinar attended by 200 solicitors and barristers.

SUSTAINABILITY OF SELF-EMPLOYED BARRISTERS' EARLY CAREERS

RECOMMENDATION 19:

Initiatives to sustain early careers for self-employed barristers

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The LSRA has begun engaging on the sustainability challenges for self-employed barristers in the early career years, particularly for women and under-represented groups.

It has developed a brief discussion paper outlining a range of sustainability challenges and potential new initiatives for discussion and consideration.

The LSRA will consult further with stakeholders, including The Bar of Ireland and barristers on the Roll of Practising Barristers, in Q2 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 20:

Introduce direct access to barristers in non-contentious matters

PROGRESS UPDATE:

With the entering into force of section 101 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 in September 2024, barristers may now provide legal services in non-contentious matters where his or her instructions on that matter were received directly from a person who is not a solicitor.

In November 2024, The Bar of Ireland Professional Practices Committee produced for its members and *Ethical Toolkit: Direct Access*. This document provides guidance to members of the independent referral bar in circumstances when they accept instructions directly from a client in a matter other than a contentious matter.

The LSRA's Legal Department has developed draft guidance for practising barristers on section 101. The LRA now intends to engage with the professional bodies and the business community to finalise its guidance for practising barristers on this matter.

SUSTAINABILITY OF SELF-EMPLOYED BARRISTERS' EARLY CAREERS

RECOMMENDATION 21:

Expanded direct access to barristers in contentious matters

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The LSRA has revisited recommendations 4-11 from its 2017 report, *Certain Issues Relating to Barristers*. These recommendations were to permit direct access to barristers in contentious matters in respect of specific categories of cases and with the prior approval of the Authority. The LSRA is currently preparing a consultation document to run a public consultation on this matter in Q 2 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 25:

Consider options to allow barristers to sue for fees

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The LSRA is engaging with The Bar of Ireland on this matter. After preliminary discussions it considered that further detailed engagement was necessary. This will take place in Q2 2025.

RECOMMENDATION 26:

Address concerns about fees levels and structures for legal aid work

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The LSRA has sought the views and concerns of The Bar of Ireland about fees and structures for legal aid work. The LSRA is currently analysing this input and intends to carry out further consultations with barristers. The LSRA also intends to now progress this issue further with key stakeholders, including the Legal Aid Board. Having considered the issue, the LSRA will prepare a report to the Minister with recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION 27:

Ensure transparency in procurement of State funded work

PROGRESS UPDATE:

The LSRA is preparing a position paper to advance engagement with the Department of Justice and other stakeholders on potential mechanisms to ensure transparency across departments and State agencies.



PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PATHWAYS

RECOMMENDATION 1: INCREASE FLEXIBLE TRAINING ROUTES AND REPORTING

The Law Society of Ireland and the Honorable Society of King’s Inns should continue to **increase flexible routes** for legal practitioner training, **reporting annually** to the LSRA and the LPET Committee once established on their initiatives and their impact.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
1.1 LSRA, LSI and HSKI agree a template for annual report on flexible training initiatives and their impact.										
1.2 LSRA seek input of section 16 Education and Training Committee.										
1.3 LSRA invite LSI and HSKI to submit first annual report on increasing flexible training routes and their impacts.										
1.4 LSRA publish information and data in its Pathways to the Professions annual report.										

RECOMMENDATION 2: ANNUAL REPORTING ON DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS AND TRAINEES

Legal practitioner training providers should **report annually** using agreed templates to the LSRA, and the LPET Committee once established, on the **diversity of intake in all legal practitioner training courses**. The data gathered would be used to enhance and expand flexible training routes, including hybrid, blended, remote and asynchronous learning.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
2.1 LSRA commission expert report on appropriate diversity data to be collected.										
2.2 LSRA engage with LSI and HSKI on lawful basis and methodology for collection of data.										
2.3 LSRA seek the input of the section 16 Education and Training Committee.										
2.4 LSRA request training providers to collect data and submit in agreed format.										
2.5 Training providers collect the data for their student/trainee intake in autumn 2025.										
2.6 LSRA publish annual update on diversity data in “Pathways to the Professions” annual reports.										



PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PATHWAYS

RECOMMENDATION 3: EXPLORE LEVY AND OTHER FUNDING FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORTS FOR DIVERSITY

The LSRA and the professional bodies should **explore the use of the annual levy** on the professions and **other funding mechanisms** to develop **increased financial support** for prospective solicitors and barristers to increase diversity of intake.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
3.1 LSRA and professional bodies meet to discuss innovative solutions and funding mechanisms.										
3.2 LSRA consultation with the legal professions and other key stakeholders on proposed supports.										
3.3 LSRA bring proposals to the Minister.										

RECOMMENDATION 4: REVIEW MANDATORY REQUIREMENT OF PUPILLAGE IN KING’S INNS CODE

The Honorable Society of King’s Inns should **review the mandatory requirement** in its Code of Conduct that **barristers undertake nine months’ pupillage** before they can represent clients before courts. This should be done once the King’s Inns demonstrates to the LPET Committee, once established, that its Barrister-at-Law degree meets the competency framework standard for entering practice as a barrister.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
4.1 LSRA engage with HSKI on mandatory pupillage requirement.										
4.2 LSRA engage with Bol on mandatory pupillage requirement.										
4.3 LSRA engage Sec 16 Committee to ensure BL degree meets competency framework standard for entering practice as a barrister.										
4.4 LPET Committee request HSKI to report on compliance with recommendations once it is established (timeline not yet determined).										



SOLICITOR TRAINEESHIPS

RECOMMENDATION 10: SOLICITOR TRAINEESHIPS IN CIVIL AND PUBLIC SERVICE

The Law Society should work with key stakeholders to **actively encourage and support direct intake** of trainee solicitors **in the public and private sectors**, with particular focus on **the civil and public service**.

Public sector agencies that routinely recruit solicitors are **encouraged to establish direct trainee** intake schemes.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
10.1 LSI consider and develop a liaison strategy with the public and private sector agencies.										
10.2 LSRA engage with LSI on viability of establishing a direct trainee intake scheme for the LSRA.										
10.3 LSRA assist with messaging and engagement to encourage the establishment of direct trainee intake schemes in other appropriate agencies.										

INFORMATION ON CAREER PATHWAYS AND OPPORTUNITIES

● ACHIEVED
● IN PROGRESS
● FUTURE ACTION



RECOMMENDATION 17: MORE INFORMATION TO HIGHLIGHT DIFFERENT CAREER PATHWAYS

The LPET Committee, once established, should engage with the Honorable Society of King’s Inns, the Law Society and public and private sector employers to **highlight different career pathways** for barristers and solicitors. Further, the **introduction of legal partnerships** is an opportunity for the LSRA and the LPET Committee once established, in collaboration with the King’s Inns and the Law Society, to roll out an **information campaign and enhanced outreach as well as other supports** for barristers and solicitors interested in this new business model.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
17.1 LSRA to engage with HSKI, LSI, public and private sector employers to highlight different career pathways.		●								
17.2 LSRA produce a roadmap for LPET Committee on how best to highlight different career pathways.						●				
17.3 LSRA engage with the HSKI and LSI on an information campaign on legal partnerships.	●									

SUSTAINABILITY OF SELF-EMPLOYED BARRISTERS' EARLY CAREERS



RECOMMENDATION 19: INITIATIVES TO SUSTAIN EARLY CAREERS FOR SELF-EMPLOYED BARRISTERS

The LSRA should engage with the barrister profession to **consider initiatives to make a career as a self-employed practising barrister more sustainable in the early years**, in particular for **women and under-represented groups**. Reforms could include, for example, targeted initiatives, practical information on the self-employed profession, practical supports in relation to building and managing a practice, alternative career pathways and new business models including legal partnerships, professional wellbeing, mentoring and personal development.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
19.1 LSRA regularly consult with entire barrister profession to identify and recommend new initiatives to increase career sustainability.		●								
19.2 LSRA invite Bol to provide information on work already undertaken and progress made in this area.		●								
19.3 LSRA and the Bol to consider/explore the development of the initiatives.					●					

RECOMMENDATION 20: INTRODUCE DIRECT ACCESS TO BARRISTERS IN NON-CONTENTIOUS MATTERS

The LSRA should engage with the Department of Justice on **introducing direct professional access** to barristers in non-contentious matters. This would be achieved with the commencement of section 101 of the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015. Section 101 states that no professional code shall operate to prevent a barrister from providing legal services as a practising barrister in relation to a matter, other than a contentious matter, where his or her instructions on that matter were received directly from a person who is not a solicitor. The LSRA to **engage with the profession and develop and provide guidance** where necessary on the receipt of direct instructions in non-contentious matters.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
20.1 Section 101 was commenced on 25 September 2024.	●									
20.2 LSRA engage with professional bodies and business community to develop guidance for the legal profession on application of section 101.		●								
20.3 Bar of Ireland to publish guidance on section 101 for its members.	●									

SUSTAINABILITY OF SELF-EMPLOYED BARRISTERS' EARLY CAREERS



RECOMMENDATION 21: EXPAND DIRECT ACCESS TO BARRISTERS IN CONTENTIOUS MATTERS

The LSRA should progress work on a **scheme for expanded direct access** to barristers. The LSRA previously recommended that direct access to barristers be permitted to organisational clients in contentious matters in certain circumstances.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025			2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
21.1 LSRA revisit recommendations from 2017 report on permitted direct access in contentious matters.									
21.2 LSRA conduct a public consultation on recommendations 4-11.									
21.3 LSRA engage with professional bodies and wider legal profession on recommendations 4-11.									
21.4 LSRA report to Minister on legislative changes and framework required to expand direct access to barristers.									

RECOMMENDATION 25: CONSIDER OPTIONS TO ALLOW BARRISTERS TO SUE FOR FEES

The LSRA should **consult with key stakeholders** on options for changing the law to **allow barristers to sue for their fees**, and report on the matter with recommendations to the Department of Justice.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025			2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
25.1 LSRA consult with relevant stakeholders on allowing barristers to sue for their fees.									
25.2 LSRA to report to the Minister with recommendations.									

SUSTAINABILITY OF SELF-EMPLOYED BARRISTERS' EARLY CAREERS

● ACHIEVED
● IN PROGRESS
● FUTURE ACTION



RECOMMENDATION 26: ADDRESS CONCERNS RE FEES LEVELS & STRUCTURES FOR LEGAL AID WORK

Engagement between relevant stakeholders should be intensified so that the concerns identified in the LSRA research around the **levels and structure of professional fees** for State funded legal aid work undertaken by junior barristers are explored and addressed.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
26.1 LSRA engage with relevant stakeholders to explore recommendation with the purpose of developing a roadmap addressing concerns in a timely manner.	●									

RECOMMENDATION 27: ENSURE TRANSPARENCY IN PROCUREMENT OF STATE FUNDED WORK

The Department of Justice should consider current mechanisms across all government departments and State agencies to **ensure transparency in the procurement and distribution of State funded work** for early career barristers and solicitors including the potential for the introduction of **equitable briefing policies** and standards.

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS	2024		2025				2026			
	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
27.1 LSRA engage DoJ on potential mechanisms to ensure transparency across departments and State agencies.		●								
27.2 LSRA to consult with all government departments and state agencies on the introduction of transparency measures and the potential introduction of equitable briefing policies and standards.					●					