



The Law Society

Diversity profile of the profession

A short synopsis

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supporting
solicitors

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1. Introduction

This short report has been produced by the Law Society and Equality and Diversity (E&D) team. It highlights the most up-to-date data available on the diversity profile of solicitors holding practising certificates (PCs) in England and Wales. Although the report focuses on diversity profile, it also summarises data on other aspects of the profession such as the size of the profession and post graduate education which has diversity relevance.

2. Sources of data

The report draws data from two sources:

- The main source used for this report was the Annual Statistical Report 2010 of the Law Society's Research Unit based on the data extracted from the Law Society's REGIS database which contains records of all solicitors at all stages in their career.
- Data was also extracted from the Annual Individual Solicitors Omnibus Survey (2009 and 2011) - a survey of a random sample of 1,200 solicitors from private practice, commerce and industry and government conducted in April-May 2009 and repeated in 2011 over the telephone.

3. Diversity profile: factsheet

The following table provides the key figures on six diversity strands of the profession - gender, disability, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and belief. The table also provides key figures on socio economic background. The data on gender, age and ethnicity of practicing certificate (PC) holders were obtained from the Annual Statistical Report 2010 of the Law Society's Research Unit, and the data on disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief were gathered from the Annual Individual Solicitors' Omnibus 2011. The data on socio economic background were gathered from the Annual Individual Solicitors Omnibus 2009.¹

Diversity Strand		per cent of PC holders
Gender	Male	54.2
	Female	45.8
Disability	Disabled	3.0
	Not disabled	96.4
Ethnicity	White/European	78.0
	African Caribbean	0.7
	African	1.2
	Asian	6.3
	Chinese	1.2
	Other ethnic group	1.9
Age	Under 25	0.9
	26-30	16.3
	31-35	19.0
	36-40	16.1
	41-45	14.2
	46-50	11.3
	51-55	9.2
	56-60	6.9
	61-65	4.2
	66-70	1.3
	71+	0.7
Sexual orientation	Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual	1.2
	Heterosexual/straight	87.0
Religion or belief	Buddhist	0.4
	Christian	47.3
	Hindu	1.7
	Jewish	1.4
	Muslim	1.6
	No Religion	41.2
	Other	0.4
	Sikhism	0.9
Socio-economic background	Have parents in professional/managerial occupations	73
	Attended independent/public school	27
	Received a qualifying law degree	72
	Attended a Redbrick university	30
	Experienced the profession prior to qualification through working experience	70

¹ Figures in each diversity strand might not add up to 100 due to the exclusion from the table of such categories as 'do not know' or 'refuse to say'.

4. The size of the profession

- As at 31 July 2010, 117,862 solicitors held practising certificates (78.5 per cent of those on the roll), an increase of 2.1 per cent on the previous year.
- Since 1980, the total number of solicitors holding practice certificates has grown by 211.5 per cent at an average rate of 3.9 per cent.
- These solicitors were employed in 17,238 separate organisations of which, 15,420 were based in England and Wales.
- 86,748 (73.6 per cent) of solicitors holding practising certificates worked in private practice in England and Wales; the remainder worked mainly in commerce and industry and the public sector.
- Since 2000 the proportion of practising certificate holders not employed in private practice in England and Wales has increased from 19.7 per cent to 26.4 per cent.

5. A descriptive profile

- In 2009–10, excluding those whose ethnicity was unknown, solicitors from Black Minority and Ethnic (BME) groups 11.1 per cent of all solicitors with practising certificates, and 10.3 per cent of all solicitors in private practice.
- Women now account for 45.8 per cent of solicitors with practising certificates. Whereas since 2000 the total number of solicitors holding practising certificates has grown by 42.4 per cent, the number of women holding practising certificates has nearly doubled, having increased by 79.7 per cent.
- 76.3 per cent of men holding practising certificates work within private practice, compared to only 70.3 per cent of women.
- In 2010 the average age of a male practising certificate holder was 44.4 years compared to only 38.1 years for female practising certificate holders.
- In 2010, the average age of a female solicitor in private practice was 37.5 years compared with 44.7 years for men. The average age of a sole practitioner was 50.0 years compared with 47.5 years for partners and 41.5 years for all solicitors in private practice.
- Over one-third of practising certificate holders in 2010 (37.2 per cent) were employed by organisations based in London. These organisations were responsible for the employment of just under one half (49.3 per cent) of all BME practising certificate holders.

6. Trends in post-graduate education

- In 2009 there were 29,211 applicants to study first degree courses in law in England and Wales, of whom 19,882 (68.1 per cent) were accepted.
- Of the 13,433 graduates in the summer of 2009, over half (56.6 per cent) achieved firsts or upper second classifications. More women graduated with firsts and upper seconds than men, 58.0 per cent as opposed to 54.2 per cent.
- In the year ending 31 July 2010, 8,098 students enrolled with the Solicitors Regulation Authority. Of these students 61.8 per cent were women and 31.0 per cent were drawn from BME groups.
- Of those who took the LPC examination in 2010, 89.7 per cent passed.
- 11,370 full-time and 3,140 part-time LPC places were available in 2009–10. In 2010-11 there will be 12,142 full-time and 3,024 part-time places available.
- There were 4,874 new traineeships registered in the year 1 August 2009 to 31 July 2010. This is a decrease of 16.1 per cent on the level recorded last year.
- Of the new trainees registered, 62.7 per cent were women, and 19.9 per cent of trainees with known ethnicity were drawn from BME groups.
- In the year to 31 July 2010, admissions to the Roll (i.e. newly qualified solicitors and transfers from other legal professions) were 8,480, a marginal decrease of 0.1 per cent on admissions the year before.
- Of new admissions, 59.1 per cent were women, and admissions from BME groups represented 22.1 per cent of all admissions where the ethnicity was known.

7. Age

The table below shows the age distribution of solicitors in five year groups. Almost two-thirds (65.6 per cent) of PC holders were between 26 and 45 years of age, 6.2 per cent were of state pension age and just 0.9 per cent were 25 or younger.

Age	PC holders	per cent
25 and under	1,034	0.9
26-30	19,196	16.3
31-35	22,335	19.0
36-40	18,945	16.1
41-45	16,779	14.2
46-50	13,287	11.3
51-55	10,845	9.2
56-60	8,087	6.9
61-65	4,892	4.2
66-70	1,541	1.3
71 and over	856	0.7
	117,797	100.0

8. Gender

Since 2000, the total number of solicitors with practising certificates has grown by 42.4 per cent. However, over this period the number of women solicitors with practising certificates has increased by 79.7 per cent whilst the number of men increased by only 21.1 per cent. The proportion of female solicitors holding practising certificates was 45.8 per cent at 31 July 2010 compared with 36.2 per cent in 2000. For the past ten years, women have accounted for over one-half of new entrants to the profession, so this proportion is set to increase for the foreseeable future.

Gender	No of PC holders	per cent
Male	63, 896	54.2
Female	53,966	45.8
Total	117,862	100.0

9. Age and gender

The table below shows that for those aged 35 and under there were over 1.5 female PC holders for every male PC holder; however in the older age groups male PC holders represented the majority reaching eight male PC holders for every female PC holder in the group of those aged over 61. Overall, the calculation of the median age for females and males indicates that one-half of women solicitors with PCs were aged 36 or younger, whereas one-half of men with PCs were aged 43 or younger.

Age	Number of men with PC	per cent	Number of women with PC	per cent
25 and under	330	0.5	704	1.3
26-30	7,032	11.0	12,164	22.5
31-35	9,558	15.0	12,777	23.7
36-40	9,779	15.3	9,166	17.0
41-45	9,285	14.5	7,494	13.9
46-50	7,894	12.4	5,393	10.0
51-55	7,256	11.4	3,589	6.7
56-60	6,244	9.8	1,843	3.4
61-65	4,260	6.7	632	1.2
66-70	1,419	2.2	122	0.2
71 and over	795	1.2	61	0.1
All ages known	63,852	100	53,945	100

10. Ethnicity

The table below records the number of solicitors with practising certificates who were known to belong to a Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) group. The provision of information on ethnicity by individuals is entirely optional, and, at July 2010, was known for 89.1 per cent of practising certificate holders.

BME solicitors were estimated to account for 11.1 per cent of solicitors with practising certificates in 2010, an increase on the 10.6 per cent recorded in 2009. Within this total, 13.8 per cent of women solicitors were members of a BME group compared with only 8.8 per cent of men.

Ethnic origin	Men	Women	Total	per cent
White/European	50,558	41,354	91,912	78.0
African-Caribbean	228	559	787	0.7
Asian	3,361	4,015	7,376	6.3
Chinese	513	845	1,358	1.2
African	585	777	1,362	1.2
Other ethnic group	943	1,278	2,221	1.9
All solicitors for whom ethnicity is known	56,188	48,828	105,016	89.1
All BME practice certificate holders known to Law Society	5,630	7,474	13,104	
per cent of all solicitors with practising certificates	8.8	13.8	11.1	
Unanswered	1	0	1	0.0
Refused	7,707	5,138	12,845	10.9
All PC holders	63,896	53,966	117,862	100.00
per cent of all solicitors for whom ethnicity is known	87.9	90.5	9.1	

11. Religion or belief

The Law Society's Individual Solicitors' Omnibus survey 2011 indicated that 47.3 per cent of PC holders were Christian, 41.2 per cent had no religion, 1.7 per cent were Hindu, 1.6 per cent - Muslim, 1.4 per cent - Jewish, 0.9 per cent - Sikh followed by 0.4 per cent of those practicing Buddhism. The most accurate data on religion in the population in general are available from the Census in England and Wales 2001². As seen from the table, PC holders with no religion were significantly over-represented compared with the population in general whereas those of Christian and Muslim religions seem to have been under-represented³.

	PC holders	per cent	per cent in general population
no religion	494	41.2	16.1
Christian	568	47.3	77.7
Buddhist	5	0.4	0.3
Hindu	20	1.7	1.2
Jewish	17	1.4	0.5
Muslim	19	1.6	3.2
Sikh	11	0.9	0.7
Other	5	0.4	0.3
Prefer not to say	61	5.1	NA
All	1,200	100.0	100.0

12. Sexual orientation

According to the Individual Solicitors' Omnibus Survey 2011, almost nine in 10 (87.3 per cent) PC holders were heterosexual/straight, 0.8 per cent were gay men, 0.3 per cent - gay women, one solicitor was bisexual and 11.3 per cent of private certificate holders preferred not to reveal this information. These findings are broadly representative of the population of England and Wales as a whole where around 1.4 per cent people were gay/lesbian/bisexual in 2009-10⁴.

	PC holders	per cent
Bisexual	1	0.1
Gay man	10	0.8
Gay woman / lesbian	4	0.3
Heterosexual / straight	1,048	87.3
Other	1	0.1
Prefer not to say	136	11.3
All	1,200	100.0

² Ethnicity and Religion, 2006, Office for National Statistics, P. 3

³ The comparison of PC holders of other religious backgrounds with the general population might bear a mistake due to the small proportions and a ten years gap in time.

⁴ Measuring Sexual Identity: an Evaluation Report, September 2010, Office for National Statistics, P. 27

13. Disability

In 2009-10 at least 20 per cent (seven million) of the working age population 16-64 in England and Wales were disabled⁵. This estimate of the proportion of people with disability covers both DDA disabled (someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities⁶) and those work-limiting disabled.

In 2011 three per cent of solicitors in England and Wales reported to have had a long-term illness, health problem or disability⁷. Since some solicitors render this information sensitive⁸, this figure should be treated as a lower limit of the proportion of solicitors with long-term illness or disability. Nonetheless, the data at hand suggests that disabled people are under represented in the solicitors profession compared with the working age population of England and Wales in general.

Disability	PC holders	per cent
Yes	36	3.0
No	1,157	96.4
Refused	7	0.6
All	1,200	100.0

14. Socio-economic background

There are no agreed set of indicators for measuring socio economic background however this is something that the Law Society is currently working on. A series of questions were placed on the 2009 Omnibus Survey to provide a profile of current PC holders' educational and social background. This was to inform the Law Society's contributions to discussions on social class and fair access to the professions. The findings are summarised below:

Socio-economic background of PC holders

- Around one third of solicitors (35 per cent) came from families where one or both parents were in a professional occupation. Almost three quarters (73 per cent) came from backgrounds where either mother or father (or both) had occupations falling within the two highest occupational groups.
- A higher proportion of white solicitors than BME solicitors had parents working in professional or managerial or technical occupations (75 per cent compared to 58 per cent respectively).

Type of secondary school attended

- While the proportion of solicitors having attended independent or public schools (27 per cent) suggested that solicitors were overrepresented compared to society in general (seven per cent), the actual figure fell well below estimates for the professions generally and previous estimates in relation to solicitors (55 per cent)⁹.

⁵ [Annual Population Survey October 2009- September 2010](#), accessed through Nomis,

⁶ Definition cited in the Equality Act 2010, which substituted the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA),

⁷ [Annual Individual Solicitors' Omnibus Survey 2011, The Law Society Research Unit, 2011](#)

⁸ Career Experiences of Solicitors with Disabilities, The Law Society, 2003, see for example P. 15-19

⁹ Sutton Trust Submission to the Milburn Commission, The Educational Backgrounds of Leading Lawyers, Journalists, Vice Chancellors, Politicians, Medics and Chief Executives, March 2009, p3

- Solicitors with parents working in professional occupations were twice as likely to have attended an independent or public school as those with parents in other occupational groups (42 per cent compared to 20 per cent).

Type of first degree

- Three quarters of PC holders had undertaken a qualifying law degree, one fifth had taken a degree in another topic and less than one tenth had not obtained a degree. The most popular subjects for those taking a non-law degree were history, economics and business studies.
- Solicitors with parents in professional occupations were more likely to have undertaken a non-law degree compared to those with parents in other occupational groups. Whether the decision to specialise later is a consequence of choice or of cost is unknown.

Type of academic institution

- Seven percent of solicitors had attended either Oxford or Cambridge, this compares to 14 per cent of PC holders in 1999¹⁰.
- Solicitors from professional backgrounds were more likely to have attended an 'ancient' university (12 per cent), (universities founded before 1900, including Oxford and Cambridge), compared to those from other occupational backgrounds (eight per cent).
- A higher proportion of solicitors from other occupational backgrounds had attended 'new' universities (established post 1992) or other institutions (colleges or polytechnics) (44 per cent) compared to those from professional backgrounds (33 per cent).

Early experience of legal life

- Solicitors in the current survey were more likely to have had contact with the legal profession through a parent or close relative (28 per cent) compared to in the past, 17 per cent in 1999.
- Seven out of 10 solicitors had experience of the profession prior to qualification through some form of work experience. Individuals from professional backgrounds (75 per cent) were slightly more likely to have gained work experience prior to qualification compared to those from other occupational backgrounds (68 per cent).

¹⁰ Punt, T. Cole, B, *Routes into the solicitors' profession and the utilisation of professional time* Research Study No.36 The Law Society