



The Law Society

# The Law Society Disability Equality Scheme (DES)

Equality and Diversity Unit  
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## **Section 1: Introduction**

The Law Society of England and Wales regulates and represents all solicitors in England and Wales. It serves and provides leadership to a diverse profession. It also provides some direct services to the public, largely in the form of a consumer complaints service. The Law Society employs staff from many different backgrounds.

The Law Society values this diversity and is committed to 'playing a leading role in the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality and diversity in all its activities as a regulator, representative body and an employer'.

The Law Society has been subject to the general anti-discrimination legislation of the past 30 years or so. From December 2006, the Law Society's public functions (largely its regulation and consumer complaints handling responsibilities) will be subject to the public duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (DDA). The Disability Equality Duty requires a public authority (this includes the public functions of the Law Society), when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the following:

- Promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and other people.
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
- Eliminate disability-related harassment.
- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people.
- Encourage participation of disabled people in public life.
- Take steps to meet disabled people's needs, even if this requires more favourable treatment.

The Law Society is also subject to a specific duty which requires it to publish a Disability Equality Scheme by December 2006.

### **The Law Society approach**

The Law Society has been subject to the disability anti-discrimination legislation for many years. In this time it has undertaken a number of activities to ensure compliance with the legislation as well as its own equality and diversity policies and good practice. This has routinely included issues of disability. In many ways the objectives of the general duty are already integral to the Law Society's equality and diversity policies.

The purpose of the Law Society Disability Equality Scheme (DES) is to set out and explain, in one place, its plan to ensure that progress is made to comply with the general duty.

The DES will sit as part of our overall Equality and Diversity Strategy (see Annex A) and should be read and interpreted within this wider context.

Mainstreaming equality and diversity work is one of the guiding principles of our approach. This also applies to our work on disability equality. We believe that disability equality can best be achieved by ensuring that these issues are integral to our core activities and day-to-day operations.

We also recognise that some people can face multiple discrimination and disadvantages – for example disabled women – and that this may require specific action.

It is envisaged that the DES will reflect this approach, and bring together the relevant parts of existing strategies and actions and incorporate any new actions necessary to meet the requirements of the DES.

The Law Society is currently undergoing significant changes in response to proposed changes to the regulation arrangements for legal services in England and Wales. The DES is being developed against this background and, in light of this; the DES will cover a period of 18 months from December 2006 to June 2008, with a review after this period. This will allow for any further changes to be reflected in this work.

### **Developing the Disability Equality Scheme**

The Law Society Disability Equality Scheme has been developed in discussion with a number of stakeholders, but the primary involvement has been with the Group for Solicitors with Disability which represents the interests of disabled solicitors. In addition, views and comments have been sought from a number of external organisations representing disabled groups or providing services to disabled people.

To seek wider input, a survey of GSD members was also commissioned to seek views on issues and priorities they would like to see included in the Law Society DES. The survey report is available as Annex B.

Internally, the Law Society undertook an equality and diversity staff survey in August 2006, and the outcomes have been taken into account in developing this scheme.

## **Section 2: Current context**

This section highlights the information and data we have at present which forms the basis of activities that the Law Society will undertake in the next 12–18 months.

### **Data available**

The Law Society has in place a number of monitoring mechanisms which provide some information on disability issues. Response to the request for information on disability has been disappointingly low, and this is one of issues which will need to be addressed in the action plan.

### **Profile of the profession**

According to current Law Society records on the demographic profile of the profession, 453 solicitors have declared a disability. This is almost certainly an under-representation. With such small numbers it is difficult to undertake any meaningful analysis with respect to the type of practice or earnings etc, which we can do with gender and race.

### **LPC students/trainee contracts**

Since 2004, 94 students have declared a disability.

### **Profile of Law Society Council members (September 2005)**

Out of the 94 Council members where diversity information is known, five have declared a disability.

### **Profile of Law Society Committee members (September 2005)**

Out of the 308 committee members where diversity information is known, five have declared a disability.

### **Profile of complainants**

The Consumer Complaints Service monitors disability with regard to complainant satisfaction. Following the closure of a case, the complainant is sent a feedback form for their views on how their complaint has been handled. As part of the form, diversity information including an indication of disability is requested.

From October 2005 to September 2005, out of 4865 responses received only 3.5 per cent indicated that they had a disability. Again, such low numbers do not provide a sufficiently wide sample to undertake a detailed quantitative analysis on consumer satisfaction rates for disabled complainants.

### **Discrimination complaints received by the Law Society against solicitors**

In 2004, seven allegations of disability discrimination were resolved.

In 2005, new complaints received were four allegations of disability discrimination by clients, and three by non-clients.

### **Staff profile**

Four staff (0.35 per cent) have declared a disability.

### **Other information**

To support the data available, a survey on the views of disabled solicitors was undertaken by GSD in August 2006. In interpreting these findings, it is important to note that this was a qualitative survey of GSD members and a total of 93 responses were received by 10 October 2006. Whilst the numbers may be small, the findings provide some guidance as to where we might want to focus further research.

Three statements were put to the respondents, who were asked to agree or disagree with the statements.

#### **Statement 1**

##### ***The profession has a positive and constructive approach to disabled people***

Nearly half of the respondents (47.7 per cent) disagreed with the statement, while 20.5 per cent agreed or strongly agreed and the rest had no view.

#### **Statement 2**

##### ***Disabled people have to be a lot better than the competition to be successful in a job interview***

While 82.6 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 5.9 per cent disagreed and the rest had no view.

### **Statement 3**

#### ***The Law Society deals with discrimination effectively***

A majority of respondents (54.5 per cent) had no view, 20.5 per cent agreed or strongly agreed, and 25 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

As part of the survey, respondents were also asked to provide an input into the development of the DES. They were asked to identify what actions the Law Society can take to remove barriers to entry into the profession for disabled people and to promote disability issues in the profession. The responses included the following issues for the Law Society to address:

- Access to and progression within the profession for disabled solicitors.
- Access to Law Society buildings as well as those used by the profession such as courts.
- Access to documents and information provided to disabled solicitors in the course of undertaking their work.
- Raise awareness about disability issues, such as reasonable adjustments, among the profession.
- Make better use of Law Society regulatory powers to promote equality for disabled solicitors.
- Promotion of disabled solicitor role models.
- Disability equality training for Law Society staff and the profession.

### **Equality and diversity staff survey**

Our monitoring figures indicate that only four employees have declared that they have a disability. Again, it is highly likely that this is an under-representation. However, we do have some information on staff views on how the Law Society deals with employment and disability issues from the staff survey undertaken in August 2006.

The survey covered a range of diversity issues, but the following findings are of particular relevance to the DES. These findings need to be viewed with some caution, given the low level of disabled respondents. Nevertheless, the findings do provide some guidance to areas which need attention.

- With regard to career progression, 62 per cent of disabled staff felt that they were treated fairly by the Law Society to a large extent, and 34 per cent to some extent; 4 per cent felt that they were not treated fairly at all
- Disabled respondents were more likely than non-disabled respondents to feel that Law Society employment policies are less accessible to them.
- Nearly 4 in 10 disabled respondents feel discriminated against on grounds of their disability.

### **Current Law Society activities**

As indicated earlier, undertaking work on disability issues is not new to the Law Society. It has had statutory obligation in this regard for some time. In any event, in line with good practice, the Law Society has taken a comprehensive approach to promoting diversity and this has included disability issues such as:

## **Monitoring**

Diversity monitoring is a basic but important first step in dealing with inequalities, and this is true for disability issues. Information on disability is requested as part of the Society's diversity monitoring of both internal and external policies. More recently, this has included asking for this information at the student enrolment stage and asking LPC providers to do the same.

## **Access to the profession**

The Law Society undertakes a number of activities such as the Diversity Access Scheme (DAS) to promote access to the profession for those who may be excluded for reasons of their ethnicity, gender or disability. One of the elements of the scheme is to provide financial support to individuals who have the talent to qualify as solicitors but face barriers. The scheme has benefited a number of disabled students. About one-third of the students supported through the DAS have had a disability.

The Legal Education and Training Unit is in the process of assessing criteria and policies to ensure that, as a qualifying body, the Law Society does not discriminate unjustifiably against disabled students. To this end, training is being provided on the impact of the DDA and reasonable adjustments to the Professional Competence Team (which deals with the entry into the profession and maintaining standards) in the Legal Education and Training Unit.

## **Making reasonable adjustments**

In the regulation of solicitors and dealing with the consumer complaints services, as far as it is possible reasonable adjustments have been made. For example, minicom facilities have been made available or local conciliation officers have been used where communication needs require face to face discussions, and interpretation facilities have been provided or timescales readjusted where disabled solicitors might need longer to respond to requests for information.

## **Promoting disability issues in the profession**

In recent years, the Law Society has done this in a number of ways. For example:

- The Law Society provides financial and staff support to the Group for Solicitors with Disability (GSD). The GSD represents and promotes the needs, interests and aspirations of disabled solicitors. This partnership has been invaluable, in that it has contributed to raising awareness of issues within both the profession and the Law Society. The GSD has a designated seat in Law Society Council.
- The other activity involves raising awareness of statutory obligations and good practice in the profession. The Law Society guide (*Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – An essential guide for solicitors*) has been updated and published.
- In 2005, a series of regional seminars on providing information and raising awareness on disability issues for law firms was held across England and Wales.
- Lobbying the Legal Services Commission to cover the costs of providing sign language interpreters for disabled clients using legal services.

## **Access to Law Society buildings**

A programme of works designed to make Law Society buildings accessible has been under way for some time and will continue.

These are examples of some of the work the Law Society already undertakes. However, it is clear that there is much more to do, and the DES action plan sets out the activities planned for the next 12–18 months.

### **Section 3: Action plan**

The action plan, which is the core part of the Law Society DES, sets out the activities the Law Society will undertake over the next 12–18 months. This will enable progress to be made on the general duty. The action plan has been developed taking into account the Law Society's current activities on diversity, an assessment of views and comments on gaps and key priority areas, any further information the communications survey may provide and resource requirements. The action plan is seen as the core component of the Law Society DES, as it sets out the actions we will take to make progress.

The action plans has five key themes

- Better information and data collection on the needs, views and aspirations of disabled solicitors and disabled users of Law Society service, including accessible communication
- Improving access to and progression within the profession for disabled people
- Promoting disability equality in the profession
- Impact assessment of key regulatory processes
- Improving staff competencies in dealing with disability issues

## Law Society Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan

January 2007 – June 2008

	Objective	Activity	Lead responsibility	Target date for completion
<b>Better information and data collection</b>	Enhance information and data which will assist the Law Society in gaining a better understanding of the needs and aspirations of disabled solicitors.	<p>Through discussion with disabled solicitors and reviewing the experience of other organisations, seek to understand why there is reluctance to provide information about disability as part of diversity monitoring.</p> <p>As a result, identify activities which will encourage disabled solicitors to provide such information to the Law Society.</p> <p>In addition to improving data collection, consider whether further research is required to support the initial survey undertaken by the GSD.</p>	Director of Representation and Law Reform / Director of Equality and Diversity	<p>Initial assessment to be completed by June 2007</p> <p>Activities ongoing until June 2008</p>
	Improve the information available about the needs of disabled users of legal and Law Society services.	In consultation with the GSD and organisations representing disabled users of legal and Law Society services, consider the feasibility of conducting research on the experiences and needs of disabled users, with the aim of conducting any agreed research in early 2008.	Director of Equality and Diversity	<p>Initial discussions to be completed by September 2007</p> <p>Any agreed research to be undertaken in early 2008</p>

	Objective	Activity	Lead responsibility	Target date for completion
<b>Promoting disability equality in the profession and better involvement</b>	Promote understanding, information and awareness about disability statutory obligations and best practice in the profession.	<p>Update the publication <i>Disability Discrimination Act – an essential guide for solicitors</i>.</p> <p>Publish a communication guide on providing services to disabled clients and working with disabled solicitors, and information on how to make reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>Consider providing a direct training package to the profession on making reasonable adjustments.</p> <p>Promote disabled solicitor role models wherever possible, and especially in careers information.</p> <p>Encourage the Gazette to publish at least one feature article in 2007 on issues facing disabled solicitors.</p>	Director of Representation and Law Reform / Director of Equality and Diversity	October 2007
	Represent the interests of disabled solicitors.	<p>Continue to support the GSD within the framework of the Law Society's relationship with groups and sections, and in particular consider some of the suggestions for promoting issues of disability identified in the GSD survey.</p> <p>Consider how the Law Society can improve and widen its engagement/involvement with disabled solicitors and groups representing disabled clients.</p> <p>Identify and review the concerns expressed by some solicitors about access to court buildings, and make representations to the Department for Constitutional Affairs (DCA) about agreed concerns.</p> <p>Explore further the issue of a reduced practising certificate fee for disabled solicitors based on potential differentials in turnover because of reasons of disability – to be undertaken as part of a general review of fees.</p>	<p>Director of Representation and Law Reform</p> <p>Director of Equality and Diversity</p> <p>Chief Executive (Regulation)</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>December 2007</p> <p>June 2007</p> <p>July 2007</p>

	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Target date for completion</b>
Promoting disability equality in the profession and better involvement (cont)	Enhance engagement with disabled solicitors and disabled users of solicitors' services.	In addition to working with the GSD, explore how we can widen engagement and consultation with disabled solicitors through other means such as web-based communication and local Law Societies.  Consider the development of a reference group comprising disabled organisations or those representing disabled clients which will act a forum or conduit for raising and discussing issues which impact on access to justice for disabled clients.	Director of Equality and Diversity	September 2007
	Consider how the Law Society's procurement processes can promote disability equality in the purchase of goods and services.	Review the current questionnaire used for diversity assessment during the procurement of legal services by the Law Society.  Draft guidance for staff on agreed arrangements.	Director of Equality and Diversity	Dependent on date agreed as part of the 2007/9 Equality and Diversity Action plan

	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Target date for completion</b>
<b>Access and progression in the profession for disabled people</b>	Undertake activities which assist in improving access to and progression within the profession for potential and qualified solicitors.	Collate and publish an information pack on the support and assistance available to disabled law undergraduates and trainees as well as employers.	Director of Representation and Law Reform	May 2007
		Consider whether or not disability employment targets should be set alongside the ethnicity targets already in place.	Chief Executive (Regulation)	October 2007

	Objective	Activity	Lead responsibility	Target date for completion
<b>Impact assessment of policies and procedures on disabled solicitors, users and employees</b>	Ensure that regulatory activities are carried out fairly by assessing the impact of regulatory activities on disabled solicitors, and make reasonable adjustments in the regulatory processes and procedures.	<p>A programme of impact assessment has been agreed by the Regulation Board as part of its work plan. The following policies and procedures have been prioritised for impact assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training contract criteria</li> <li>• Minimum salary requirement changes</li> <li>• Character and suitability criteria</li> <li>• Criteria for monitoring visits</li> <li>• Waivers</li> <li>• Rule making and policy development</li> <li>• Complaint handling policy</li> <li>• Risk criteria</li> <li>• Response time limit/procedure</li> <li>• Dealing with capability issues</li> <li>• Impact on Section 12 applications process</li> <li>• Code of referral to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal</li> <li>• Requests for oral hearings</li> <li>• Impact of adjudication decisions</li> </ul>	Chief Executive (Regulation)	All are due to be completed by September 2007
	Review and assess the impact of current and new policies on disabled employees.	<p>The following policies are under review, and a diversity impact assessment will be undertaken for these:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal opportunities in employment</li> <li>• Recruitment and selection</li> <li>• Dignity at work</li> <li>• Disciplinary procedures</li> </ul>	Director of Finance and Resources	TBC

	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Target date for completion</b>
<b>Accessible Law Society services</b>	Ensure that the consumer complaints service is accessible to disabled clients, and that processes and procedures afford disabled complainants (and disabled solicitors) a full opportunity to present their complaint.	<p>Include disability as part of the diversity monitoring of complainants.</p> <p>Undertake a qualitative analysis of the comments received by disabled complainants as part of the satisfaction feedback and identify areas which might need action.</p> <p>Undertake a baseline audit of policies and procedures which require diversity impact assessment, and prioritise which require early assessment.</p> <p>Review the difficult complainants policy to ensure that it does not have a disproportionately adverse impact on disabled clients, especially those with mental health and learning difficulties.</p> <p>Undertake staff development so that staff are able to respond appropriately to disabled complainants.</p>	Chief Executive (Consumer Complaints)	December 2007
	To develop an accessible communications policy by codifying current arrangements and addressing any gaps	<p>Review the outcomes of the alternative formats survey report.</p> <p>Draft policy on accessible communication for approval.</p> <p>Ascertain the views of disabled Council, Board and Committee members on whether or not their communication needs are met.</p> <p>Disseminate policy and guidance to staff.</p>	Director of Equality and Diversity	April 2007

	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead responsibility</b>	<b>Target date for completion</b>
<b>Improving disabled staff profile and competencies</b>	Understand the reasons for the under-representation of disabled staff in the workforce, with a view to taking steps to increase the recruitment of disabled employees into the Law Society so that, over time, there is better representation of disabled people in the workforce	Undertake a detailed analysis of the monitoring information provided by applicants at all stages of the recruitment process to see if there are any areas which give rise to concerns about the recruitment process.	Director of Finance and Resources	May 2007
	Build staff skills, knowledge and capacity to address disability issues for staff, users and Council, Board and Committee members.	Ensure that diversity training for managers includes training on managing disabled employees or those who become disabled in the course of their employment with the Law Society.  Develop and deliver specific training on reasonable adjustments for staff.	Director of Finance and Resources	Ongoing in 2007
	Enhance the involvement of disabled employees in the development of employment policies and practices.	Given the very low numbers of staff who identify themselves as disabled, explore how disabled employees can contribute to the development and impact assessment of policies in relation to disability.	Director of Equality and Diversity	July 2007

## **Section 4: Review and evaluation arrangements**

The Law Society already has in place internal and external evaluation processes for its equality and diversity work. It is envisaged that the DES will be reviewed as part of this process. However, consideration needs to be given to how appropriate stakeholders might contribute to the evaluation of the DES in a proportionate and timely manner.

Apart from the ongoing involvement of current groups and networks, one proposal being considered is the establishment of an annual disability round table to assess progress in addition to the regular review processes already in place.

# **Annex A: The Law Society Equality and Diversity Policy and Strategy**

## **Introduction**

The Law Society serves a diverse society. It regulates and represents a diverse profession. It provides leadership to the solicitors' profession. It seeks to protect and promote access to justice for all sections of the diverse communities that make up our society today and employs staff from many different backgrounds. The Law Society values and respects this diversity, and will strive in all its activities to take account of and reflect the interests of all the people it serves.

Our equality and diversity policy and strategy is influenced by a number of factors, including our statutory obligations under the anti-discrimination legislation and changes in the demographic profile of the population, the profession and client base. We will, of course, want to comply with our statutory obligations. More importantly, as a body representing and regulating a profession which supports individuals in asserting their legal rights and accessing justice, we want to go beyond compliance and be at the forefront of embracing equality and diversity. We want to promote best practice in the profession, and encourage the profession to be sensitive to the specific needs of the different communities to which it provides legal services. We want to promote the profession as one whose members are required to treat each other, clients and others in a fair, equal and non-discriminatory manner.

Investing in equality and diversity also provides a number of business benefits, such as improving staff retention rates, widening markets and improving services. The Law Society aims to make the most of such opportunities.

We have a twin-track approach to equality and diversity – tackling inequalities and valuing diversity.

We recognise that many groups are discriminated against on grounds such as disability, gender, race, age, religion, sexual orientation and social, economic and educational background. This discrimination has led to patterns of inequality and disadvantage which impact on the life chances of many individuals. Some of these patterns of inequality are also reflected in the solicitors' profession – for example, in access to and progression within the profession. We aim to tackle such inequalities.

Alongside addressing the impact of discrimination on some groups, some of the Law Society's policies are designed to respect value and celebrate the strengths of a diverse profession and workforce. We want to promote the creation of policies and environments in the profession and the Law Society which are inclusive of the different needs, aspirations and contribution of each individual, whether or not they are protected by the anti-discrimination legislation.

The aim of the Equality and Diversity policy, strategy and action plan is to provide a framework that will help support our commitment to equality and diversity and help us to make progress towards achieving our goals.

## Our commitment

The Law Society has a commitment to:

“playing a leading role in the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality and diversity in all its activities as a regulator, representative body and an employer.”

## Strategic objectives

In order to make progress towards fulfilling this commitment, we aim to become an organisation that:

- **works towards a more inclusive profession which:**
  - is able to provide sensitive, appropriate and high-quality professional services to diverse clients
  - is a fair employer
  - has the reputation of a profession which treats everyone in a fair and equal manner
- **strives to carry out its regulatory responsibilities fairly and consistently, in compliance with the anti-discrimination legislation and the Law Society’s equality and diversity policies, by:**
  - ensuring that its regulatory policies, processes and procedures do not discriminate unjustifiably
  - undertaking regular monitoring and evaluation of its regulatory activities and decision making
  - ensuring that its Consumer Redress Scheme is accessible to all who wish to make a complaint
- **ensures that any proposed changes in relation to the regulation of the profession and arrangements for providing professional (non-regulatory) services take full account of the impact on all sections of the profession and clients by:**
  - undertaking full equality and diversity assessments of the implications for the profession and the public of any proposed changes
  - effective presentation to and lobbying of decision and policy makers on the impact of proposals on minority and under-represented groups in the profession
  - raising awareness within the profession of new opportunities arising from proposed changes
- **is a fearless champion of a diverse profession by taking into account and promoting the interests, views, needs and aspirations (commensurate with the Law Society’s equality and diversity commitment) of all sections of the profession by:**
  - understanding the needs and issues of the different groups within the profession
  - actively consulting the different groups in the profession

- challenging views and policies which either fail to take account of or are silent on the impact on different groups in the profession, users of legal services and the Law Society
- **uses its influence and position as an authoritative voice to promote equality and diversity issues by:**
  - ensuring that its law reform and legal policy work identifies and takes into account implications of policies and legislation for different groups in society, users and potential users of legal services and in the profession
  - campaigning for access to justice for vulnerable and excluded groups
  - making more effective use of procurement policies to promote its commitment to equality and diversity
- **is a fair employer which:**
  - has a diverse workforce at national and regional levels and all grades
  - ensures that all employees have equal access to benefits and opportunities commensurate with their jobs and grades
  - provides an inclusive and flexible working environment
  - ensures that all employees are provided with opportunities to develop and maintain skills and competencies to enable them to play their part in promoting equality and diversity in the organisation
- **develops the Law Society's governance structure and organisational capacity to deliver its equality and diversity commitment by:**
  - working towards ensuring that the Council, Boards and Committees reflect and represent the diversity in the profession and the communities it serves
  - ensuring that organisational structures are designed and reviewed regularly to enable the effective implementation of equality and diversity policies
  - ensuring that organisational resources are adequate and used effectively to support equality and diversity activities
  - providing those involved in the governance and management of the organisation with opportunities to develop and maintain awareness, skills and competencies so that they have the knowledge and the confidence to deal with equality and diversity issues in an inclusive and robust manner
- **works towards developing the Law Society as a model of good practice on equality and diversity issues by:**
  - moving beyond compliance to best practice in all its activities
  - leading by example
  - actively promoting equality and diversity with its partners and stakeholders
  - regularly reviewing and assessing progress toward achieving its equality and diversity goals

## **Our approach - guiding principles**

The implementation of equality and diversity policies will be guided by the following principles:

### **Mainstreaming**

We aim to ensure that equality and diversity issues are integral to all our activities – a routine part of our organisational and business planning activities. This will apply to all work and not just those areas where there are obvious equality and diversity dimensions. This means that we will systematically ensure that equality and diversity aspects and perspectives are considered in all our work by identifying the impact and consequences for different groups. To this end, we have taken steps to build equality and diversity mainstreaming into our corporate planning system.

### **Identifying and tackling inequality**

In parallel to mainstreaming, we will also take account of the fact that a number of groups have historically been discriminated against and the impact of this discrimination still affects their life chances today. We also recognise that some of these experiences are common and shared by groups of people. We will therefore develop and take measures to address disadvantage arising from such circumstances in the profession and in the provision of services by solicitors.

### **Working in partnership**

The Law Society can make better progress on equality and diversity issues by working together with its partners – the profession, users of its services, Government, other professional bodies and stakeholders – for example, organisations working on equality and diversity issues such as the Commission for Racial Equality, Equal Opportunities Commission, the Disability Rights Commission and, once it is established, the Single Equalities Commission. We will work with partner organisations to add value to our equality and diversity work.

We also recognise that the Law Society is in a strong position to use its authoritative voice to promote equality and diversity beyond its immediate areas of activities – for example, influencing the national and regional agenda in areas such as education and access to public services. Wherever appropriate, we will seek to make a constructive contribution to promoting equality and diversity in such spheres.

### **Effective use of resources**

We plan to make sure that our resources are used effectively to promote equality and diversity. This may mean investing additional resources. But this will not always be the case, and in many instances it will mean looking at how better use can be made of existing resources.

### **Impact assessment**

Monitoring and evaluation will be regular feature of our equality and diversity work, so that we are confident that our resources are properly prioritised and targeted at the right activities and that the Law Society is in compliance with its obligations arising from the anti-discrimination legislation. To help us to undertake robust evaluation, we have developed a basket of indicators which we will use to help us assess our progress and the impact of our activities. These are set out in Annex 1.

## **Implementation**

### **Action plan**

The Law Society will develop an action plan which will translate the objectives set out above into action, activities and initiatives. The action plan will be developed taking into account the wider legislative and policy context, the business needs of the Law Society and the resources available.

### **Responsibility**

The Law Society Council has overarching responsibility for equality and diversity, including providing strategic direction, setting policy and monitoring progress. Each Council member has responsibility for complying with and promoting the Law Society's equality and diversity policies.

The Council has delegated the responsibility for ensuring that progress is made on equality and diversity issues to the Corporate Governance Board. It is supported and advised on this by the Equality and Diversity Committee.

Other boards and committees have a responsibility to ensure that equality and diversity issues are taken into account fully in respect of their responsibilities and spheres of activity.

The Chief Executive and Senior Management Team have the responsibility for implementing agreed equality and diversity policies.

The Director of Equality and Diversity (supported by the Heads of Equality and Diversity in Representation and Regulation Directorates) is responsible for advising on and developing equality and diversity policies, coordinating equality and diversity activities and detailed reviews of progress.

Heads of business units and managers have an important and key role to play in ensuring that equality and diversity policies are translated into action in their units.

All members of staff have responsibility to ensure that equality and diversity policies are put into practice commensurate with their jobs and responsibilities. Staff are also responsible for making sure that they have read and understood equality and diversity policies, follow the policies and ensure that their managers are informed of any instances of potential discrimination in relation to the Law Society's responsibilities.

All other parties – for example, contractors, recruitment agencies, consultants and others acting on the Law Society's behalf – are expected to adhere to the relevant equality and diversity policies.

### **Communication**

We will communicate our equality and diversity policies and activities both internally and externally using a variety of methods and formats. This will include communicating with the profession on a regular basis and providing information to staff and potential employees. We will also include equality and diversity information in tender documents.

In addition to providing information on specific equality and diversity issues, we will strive to ensure that all our communication (including consultations, publications,

leaflets, reports, advertising etc) is accessible and reflects our commitment to equality and diversity.

### **Evaluation and development**

Assessing the impact of our policies is an important part of our aim to make real and practical changes. We will assess the impact by regular internal and external evaluation of progress against agreed objectives. To this end, we will develop performance indicators which will help us to measure and monitor progress.

We will also use other activities such as research and customer satisfaction surveys to help us review progress.

We expect to develop our policies further in light of monitoring and evaluation information, our experience of implementing the policy, national legislative, policy and social developments and changes in our business needs.