



THE LAW SOCIETY OF ENGLAND AND WALES
THE LAW SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND
THE LAW SOCIETY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

The Law Societies

JOINT BRUSSELS OFFICE

Information note on the Joint Brussels Office March 2003

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History

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is made up of three legal jurisdictions: England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Each jurisdiction has a distinct and separate solicitors' profession and an independent Law Society which represents the profession.

The Law Society of England & Wales was founded in 1825 and officially constituted by Royal Charter in 1845. There are around 100,000 practising solicitors in England & Wales. The Law Society of Scotland was established by statute in 1949. There are some 10,000 practising solicitors in Scotland. The Law Society of Northern Ireland was established by Royal Charter in 1922. There are 1,800 practising solicitors in Northern Ireland.

The Law Society of England & Wales established its Brussels Office in November 1990 and was the first national Law Society/Bar in the EU to have a representative office in the city. In January 1993, the Law Society of Scotland joined the Office, and

in May 2000 the Law Society of Northern Ireland came on board. The UK Law Societies are now jointly represented by a team of five people: the head of the office, two policy advisors and two administrative staff.

Since June 1996, the Brussels Office has been sharing premises with the German Federal Bar (Bundesrechtsanwaltskammer) which represents the interests of some 120,000 German lawyers as well as the interests of the Austrian National Bar.

Activities of the Brussels Office

The office has two main activities:

1) Representing and promoting the views and interests of the solicitors' professions

The Office briefs European Commissioners, MEPs, Member States and EU Officials on EU policy and legal developments which are of importance to solicitors and the Law Societies, and comments on draft legislation.

This function is important for two reasons:

(a) Professional practice matters

These are EU developments which affect the way solicitors practise law (for example, the right to open an office in another EU Member State and the ability to requalify as a lawyer in another Member State). The following list provides an overview of the main EU policies in which the Brussels Office is involved:

- Competition rules and the professions
- Money laundering
- The right to practice for EU lawyers
- Legal professional privilege
- Electronic commerce and commercial communications
- Legal Aid

(b) Law reform matters

These are EU policies which affect the advice solicitors give to their clients. The following list provides an overview of the main law reform areas in which the Brussels Office is involved:

- Asylum and Immigration Law
- Civil Law
- Company Law
- Competition Law
- Criminal Law
- Consumer protection
- Employment Law
- Environmental Law
- Financial Services

- Intellectual and Industrial Property Law
- Revenue Law

2) Providing advice and assistance to solicitors

The Office provides a number of services, free of charge, to solicitors from England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. These services mainly consist of ensuring that our members are aware of key developments in the above areas (professional practice and law reform). The office provides advice and information to solicitors on a regular basis through the monthly newsletter which in turn generates requests for documents and further information. The following list gives details of the form this advice and assistance can take:

(a) *EU Documentation Enquiry Service*

- Access to Green and White Papers and other consultation documents.
- Access to both proposed and adopted EC legislation (Commission proposals, European Parliament opinions, reports and amendments and Council of Ministers' common positions).
- Access to European Court judgements and opinions of the Advocates-General.

(b) *EU affairs consultancy*

- Giving seminars and conferences on EU topics.
- Information on the status of proposed EU legislation.
- Advice on how to influence EU decision-makers.
- General political and strategic advice on EU developments.
- Advice on how to keep track of EU developments.
- Advice on EU funding opportunities.

(c) *Publications on EU developments*

- Brussels Agenda, a monthly newsletter on EU affairs, which goes to over 5,000 people each month including solicitors in England & Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Brussels and elsewhere, as well as MEPs and officials of the UK's permanent representative office to the EU, the European Commission and the European Parliament.
- Guidance note on EU funding.
- Guidance note on EU information sources.
- Guidance notes on a range of law reform topics.

(d) *Brussels-based services*

- Organising visits of solicitors to the EU institutions. These study visits typically last two days and cover a visit to the European Parliament and a series of talks by policy makers in Brussels. Study visits are organised for groups of 15-20 solicitors and CPD points are accredited. The visits are tailored to the needs of the group, and to date various groups such as the Food Law Group, the Association of Women Solicitors, the Local Government Group, and the Employment Law Committee have

participated. There have also been regular visits by groups from the Law Society of Scotland.

- Assistance in contacting and meeting EU officials.
- Access to the Brussels network.
- EU library.
- Conference and meeting room facilities.