



The Law Society

# Trends in the solicitors' profession

Annual statistical report 2010

Prepared by Nina Fletcher and

Yulia Muratova

Research Unit

trends  
research

# Key statistics

## Solicitors' profession as at 31 July 2010

Solicitors on the Roll	150,128
Solicitors with practising certificates (pcs)	117,862
Private practice firms	10,413
Women solicitors with pcs	53,966
Women partners	8,002
Solicitors from minority ethnic groups with pcs	13,104
Solicitors working in private practice	86,748
Solicitors employed outside private practice	31,114
New solicitors admitted to the Roll 2009-10	8,480
Trainee solicitors commencing contracts 2009-10	4,874

Distribution of firms and solicitors 2009-10



Partners	% of firms	% of solicitors
1	38.52	7.78
2-4	46.33	22.98
5-10	9.78	15.12
11-25	3.34	12.57
26 or more	2.04	41.54

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## Introduction

This is the twenty-seventh Annual Statistical Report of the Law Society. It contains the most recent statistics available on the solicitors' branch of the legal profession.

## The Research Unit

This report was produced by the Law Society's Research Unit. The Unit helps designs, conducts and commissions research in order to assist the strategic and policy work of the Law Society. The Annual Statistical report aims to capture the changing nature of the profession over time.

## Sources of data

The main source used for this report was:

- The Law Society Group's REGIS database, which is maintained by the Solicitors Regulation Authority at its offices in Redditch. This contains records of all solicitors at all stages in their career, from initial enrolment as a student through to admission to the Roll on qualification and thereafter.

The report also draws on the Clearing House Admission Systems (UCAS) used by universities to provide information on applications, acceptances and graduates in law; and data from the Higher Educational Statistical Agency (HESA) for information on the number of law graduates and their achieved grades. Detailed references to all of the sources used are given throughout the report.

## Summary

### Key facts about the solicitors' profession

This report describes the size and composition of the solicitors' profession and describes trends in the entry of solicitors to the profession.

### The size of the profession

- As at 31 July 2010, there were 150,128 solicitors on the Roll, an increase of 3.3% on the year before.
- At the same date, 117,862 solicitors held practising certificates (78.5% of those on the Roll), an increase of 2.1% on the previous year.
- Since 1980, the total number of solicitors holding practising certificates has grown by 211.5% at an average annual rate of 3.9%.
- These solicitors were employed in 17,238 separate organisations of which 15,420 were based in England and Wales.
- 86,748, or 73.6%, 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% to 26.4%.

### A descriptive profile

- In 2009-10, excluding those whose ethnicity was unknown, solicitors from Black Minority and Ethnic (BME) groups accounted for 11.9% of all solicitors on the Roll, 11.1% of all solicitors with practising certificates, and 10.3% of all solicitors in private practice.
- Women now account for 45.8% of solicitors with practising certificates. Whereas since 2000 the total number of solicitors holding practising certificates has grown by 42.4%, the number of women holding practising certificates has nearly doubled, having increased by 79.7%.
- 76.3% of men holding practising certificates work within private practice, compared to only 70.4% 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%) were employed by organisations based in London. These organisations were responsible for the employment of just under one half (49.3%) of all BME practising certificate holders.

## Trends in private practice

- In 2010 there were 86,748 solicitors employed in private practice, an increase of only 1.9% on the number employed the year before.
- 10,413 solicitors' firms registered in England and Wales were listed on The Law Society's database, an increase of 0.5% on 2009.
- The vast majority of law firms are relatively small with 84.8% of them having four or fewer partners.
- In 2010, 42.8% of private practice firms were located in London and the South East.
- Just over one-quarter of private practice firms, 28.2%, were located in London in 2010. These firms employed 44.1% of all private practitioners.
- In 2010 the 1.7% of firms with 26 or more partners employed 31.7% of all principals and 41.6% of all solicitors in private practice. Sole practices accounted for 38.5% of firms, yet employed only 7.8% of all private practitioners.
- On average, the largest firms with 81 or more partners employed 2.17 assistant/associate solicitors per partner compared with between 0.5 and 1.72 in the smaller and medium-sized firms.

## 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%) were accepted.
- Of the 13,433 graduates in the summer of 2009, over half (56.6%) achieved firsts or upper second classifications. More women graduated with firsts and upper seconds than men, 58.0% as opposed to 54.2%.
- In the year ending 31 July 2010, 8,098 students enrolled with the Solicitors Regulation Authority. Of these students 61.8% were women and 31.0% were drawn from BME groups.
- Of those who took the LPC examination in 2010, 89.7% passed.
- 11,370 full-time and 3,140 part-time LPC places 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% on the level recorded last year.
- Of the new trainees registered, 62.7% were women, and 19.9% 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% on admissions the year before.

- Of new admissions, 59.1% were women, and admissions from BME groups represented 22.1% of all admissions where the ethnicity was known.