



The Law Society

# Trends in the solicitors' profession

*Annual statistical report 2012*

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*Research Unit*



## Key statistics

### Solicitors' profession as at 31 July 2011

Solicitors on the Roll	159,524
Solicitors with practising certificates (pcs)	121,933
Private practice firms	10,202
Women solicitors with pcs	56,720
Women partners	8,208
Solicitors from minority ethnic groups with pcs	14,600
Solicitors working in private practice	87,973
Solicitors employed outside private practice	30,010
New solicitors admitted to the Roll 2010-2011	8,402
Trainee solicitors commencing contracts 2010-2011	5,441

#### Distribution of firms and solicitors 2010-11



Partners	% of firms	% of solicitors
1	45.10	8.5
2-4	41.16	23.1
5-10	8.77	14.5
11-25	3.17	12.9
26 or more	1.81	41.1



## Acknowledgements

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## The Research Unit

The report was produced by the Law Society's Research Unit. The Unit 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 is 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.

## Summary

### Key facts about the solicitors' profession

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

### The size of the profession as at 31 July 2011

- As at 31 July 2011, there were 159,524 solicitors on the Roll, but the figure is affected by transitional arrangements in place at the time for the Roll renewal process.
- At the same date, 121,933 solicitors held practising certificates (76.4% of those on the Roll), an increase of 3.5% on the previous year.
- Since 1981, the total number of solicitors holding practising certificates has grown by 206.4% at an average annual rate of 3.8%.
- These solicitors were employed in 17,561 separate organisations of which 15,524 were based in England and Wales.
- 87,973, or 72.1% 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.
- In the last ten years, the proportion of practising certificate holders employed outside private practice in England and Wales has increased from 18.1% to 27.8%.

### A descriptive profile

- In 2010-11, excluding those whose ethnicity was unknown, solicitors from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups accounted for 12.6% of all solicitors on the Roll, 12% of all solicitors with practising certificates, and 10.9% of all solicitors in private practice.
- Over one-third of practising certificate holders in 2011 (37.1%) were employed by organisations based in London. These organisations were responsible for the employment of just under one half (49.5%) of all BAME practising certificate holders.
- Women now account for 46.5% of solicitors with practising certificates. Whereas the total number of solicitors holding practising certificates has grown by 40.8% since 2001, the number of women holding practising certificates has nearly doubled, having increased by 79.7%.
- 74.8% of men holding practising certificates work within private practice, compared to only 69.1% of women.
- In 2011 the average age of a male practising certificate holder was 44.5 years compared to only 38.4 years for female practising certificate holders.
- In 2011, the average age of a female solicitor in private practice was 37.8 years compared with 45.0 years for men. The average age of a sole practitioner was 52.4 years compared with 48.6 years for partners and 54.2 years for all solicitors in private practice.

## Trends in private practice

- As at 31 July 2011, 87,973 solicitors were employed in private practice firms registered in England and Wales, an increase of only 1.4% on the number employed the year before (and a reduction in annual change relative to 2009-10).
- 10,202 solicitors' firms registered in England and Wales were listed on The Law Society's database, a decrease of 2.0% since 2010.
- The vast majority of law firms are relatively small with 86.2% of all firms registered in England and Wales having four or fewer partners.
- In 2011, 41.7% of private practice firms were located in London and the South East.
- Just over one-quarter of private practice firms, 27.4%, were located in London in 2011. These firms employed 43.3% of all private practitioners.
- In 2011 the 1.8% of firms with 26 or more partners employed 35.9% of all principals and 41.5% of all solicitors in private practice. Sole practices accounted for 45.1% of firms, yet employed only 8.6% of all private practitioners.
- On average, the largest firms with 81 or more partners employed 2.27 assistant/associate solicitors per partner compared with between 0.5 and 1.81 in smaller and medium-sized firms.

## Training to admission

- 5,441 new traineeships were registered in the year 1 August 2010 to 31 July 2011. This represents an increase of 11.6% on the level recorded in the previous year (but last year saw a record decline in numbers).
- Of the new traineeships registered, 63.5% were for women, and 22.1% were awarded to individuals from BAME groups.
- In the year to 31 July 2011, admissions to the Roll (i.e. newly qualified solicitors and transfers from other legal professions and jurisdictions) were 8,480, a marginal decrease of 0.1% on admissions the year before.
- Of new admissions, 59.1% were women, and those from BAME groups represented 22.1% of all admissions where ethnicity was known.