

Flexible working and solicitors' work-life balance

The Law Society conducts research on the solicitors' profession in England and Wales. This fact sheet presents findings of the 2010 Solicitors' Omnibus survey which gathered information from 1,200 practising certificate holders working in private practice, commerce and industry, and government.

Key statistics 2010	All (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Solicitors offered flexible arrangements	79	77	80
Private practice	73	74	72
Commerce and industry	74	72	79
Government	98	96	99
Solicitors using flexible arrangements¹	62	54	70
Private practice	49	43	56
Commerce and industry	61	53	71
Government	87	83	91
Solicitors using flexible arrangements by firm size			
Sole practice	82	74	94
2-4 partners	70	68	74
5-10 partners	56	55	60
11-25 partners	37	18	59
26-80 partners	35	21	52
81+	20	16	28
Solicitors working part-time	12	4	20
Private practice	10	5	16
Commerce and industry	12	1	24
Government	17	4	27
Solicitors whose life-work balance has deteriorated over the past 12 months	25	25	26
Private practice	27	26	27
Commerce and industry	23	24	22
Government	24	20	26

¹ Users of flexible arrangements include solicitors who have used flexible arrangements at least once since they were introduced in their organisation.

About the survey

Each year the Law Society surveys practising certificate holders on a number of topical issues such as working patterns, equality and diversity, participation in the work of the Law Society, pro bono work and corporate responsibility activities. In April 2010 the data was collected from 1,200 solicitors from a random sample of PC holders who were interviewed by telephone. Data were then weighted by gender and post qualification experience to ensure that the sample was representative of the profession in these respects.

Opportunities for flexible working

More than three-quarters (79%) of solicitors indicated that their organisation allowed flexible working. The overwhelming majority (98%) of solicitors working in government were offered flexible working compared with 73% in private practice and 75% in commerce and industry.

Sixty-two percent of solicitors offered flexible working patterns made use of such arrangements. On average female solicitors were more likely to use flexible working patterns than their male counterparts: 70% of women were doing so against 54% of men. The gap between female and male solicitors who used flexible arrangements was less in government with 83% of men and 91% of women working flexibly, and most pronounced for those working in commerce and industry where 53% of male solicitors and 71% of female solicitors had been using flexible arrangements.

Solicitors working in sole practices were more likely to enjoy flexible working patterns than their counterparts in bigger firms, especially those with more than 81 partners where only 20% of solicitors had used flexible arrangements.

Part-time work

Twelve percent of solicitors worked part-time with female solicitors 5 times more likely than their male counterparts: 20% against 4% respectively. Take up followed the same trend as for flexible arrangements with a larger proportion of solicitors in government working part-time (17%) compared with 12% in commerce and industry and 10% in private practice. The biggest discrepancy between male and female solicitors working part-time manifested itself in commerce and industry where this ratio was 1 to 24.

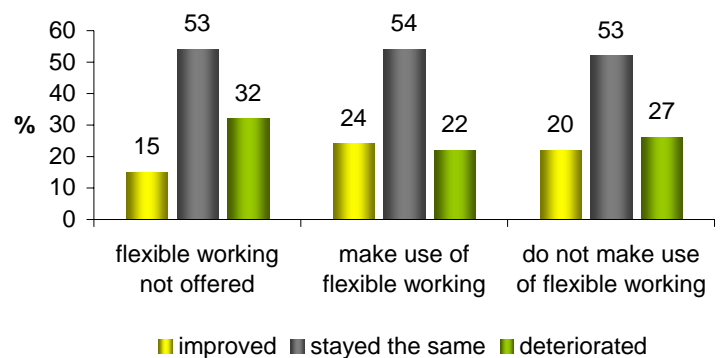
Views on work-life balance

More than half (54%) of solicitors reported that over the past 12 months their work-life balance had remained the same; it had improved for 21% and deteriorated for 25% of solicitors. Work-life balance had improved for solicitors working in commerce and industry (27% stated that) against 23% of those in this sector whose work-life balance had worsened. This trend was most likely to have been driven by female solicitors working in the sector who

more often than male solicitors stated that their work-life balance had improved (32% against 22%). Work-life balance was more likely to have deteriorated for female solicitors working in government where 26% of them indicated that compared with 20% of men who said the same.

Chart 1 below illustrates solicitors' views on work-life balance and use of flexible working arrangements. Over one-half of solicitors in all three groups argued that their work-life balance had remained the same. However, just under third (32%) of solicitors not offered flexible arrangements stated their work-life balance had worsened compared to 22% of those who used such arrangements. At the same time, solicitors working flexibly more often than solicitors of other two groups stated that their work-life balance had improved (24%).

Chart 1 Views on work-life balance and use of flexible working arrangements



Source: Law Society REGIS database

Further reading:

Trends in the solicitors' profession, Annual statistical report 2009. Bill Cole, Nina Fletcher, Tara Chittenden and Joanne Cox. Strategic Research Unit. The Law Society. 2009.