



The Law Society

School Governors

Law Society Individual Omnibus Survey

Spring 2010

supporting
solicitors

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1.0 Executive Summary

In April 2010 a random sample of 1200 practice certificate (PC) holders from private practice, commerce and industry and government were interviewed by telephone about issues affecting the profession. A set of questions was asked about solicitors' involvement in school governance, including their motivation for becoming school governors and the skills utilised in this role.

Involvement in school governance:

- Four percent of solicitors served as school governors at the time of the survey and another 7% had worked as school governors before.
- On average, solicitors had worked as school governors for almost eight years.
- Male practitioners were more likely to work as school governors than their female counterparts.
- One-third of solicitors who had previously worked as school governors were willing to serve in this capacity in the future.

Solicitors' attitudes towards becoming school governors:

- Almost four out of ten solicitors wanted to become school governors in the future or had never thought about it.
- Just below one-third of solicitors were unable to become school governors or lacked interest in doing so.
- Those solicitors expressing interest in becoming school governors in the future were more aware of how to go about it in contrast to those who had never thought about it.

Solicitors' motivation and skills for becoming school governors:

- Being involved in their children's school and putting something back into the community were among the most common reasons for becoming school governors.
- The ability to analyse and understand regulations, as well as drafting and negotiating skills were the skills most helpful for solicitors in carrying out school governor's duties.

2.0 Method

Please refer to Appendix 1.

3.0 Findings

3.1 Involvement in school governance

Fifty one practitioners out of 1200 at the time of the survey were school governors (Table 1). This was consistent with the number of school governors (48 practitioners) detected last year. On average, practitioners had served as school governors for 7.9 years (mean value). Male solicitors were twice as likely to become school governors than female solicitors: this year there were 33 male and 18 female practitioners serving as school governors.

Table 1: Distribution of solicitors who worked as school governors at the time of the survey, by gender

| Current status | All n=1200 | Male n=601 | Female n=599 |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| School governor | 51 | 33 | 18 |
| Not a school governor | 1149 | 568 | 581 |
| Total | 1200 | 601 | 599 |

Involvement in school governance varied across age groups. Table 2 suggests that younger solicitors aged under 35 were less likely to be involved in school governance compared with their older colleagues. Almost three-quarters of those serving as school governors were aged between 36-55.

Table 2: Distribution of solicitors who worked as school governors at the time of the survey, by age

| Current status | Age | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| | <35 n=477 | 36-45 n=339 | 46-55 n=261 | 56+ n=123 |
| School governor | 4 | 19 | 17 | 11 |
| Not a school governor | 473 | 320 | 244 | 112 |
| Total | 477 | 339 | 261 | 123 |

When asked whether a solicitor had been a school governor in the past, 80 practitioners gave an affirmative answer. On average, they had worked as school governors for 4.8 years (mean value). Just under three-quarters of solicitors who had been school governors in the past were aged over 46. Less than 10% of practitioners (6 out of 80) who had served as school governors were younger than 35 years old. One-third (29 out of 80) of practitioners said they would like to become school governors again in the future.

Table 3: Distribution of solicitors who worked as school governors in the past, by age

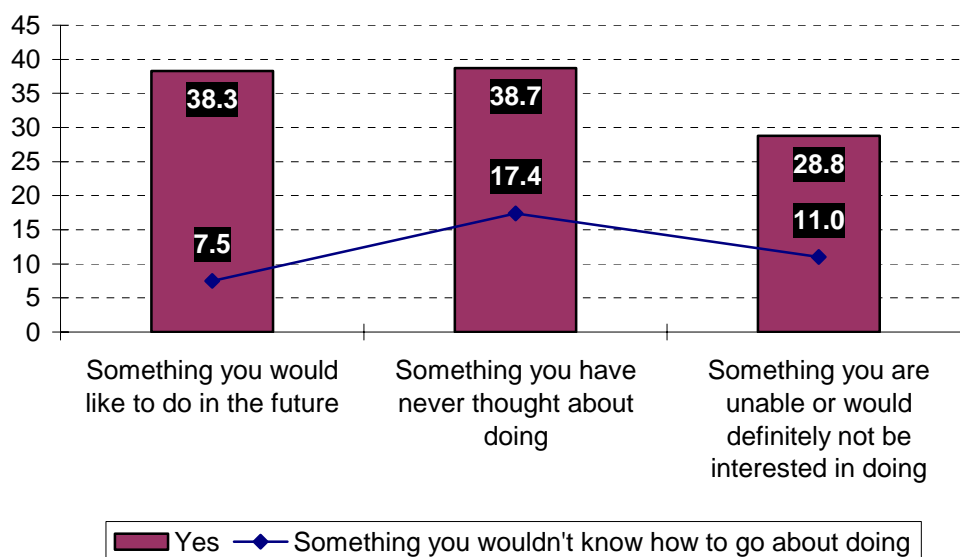
| | | Age | | | |
|-----------------------|------|--------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Past status | All | <35 n=473 | 36-45 n=320 | 46-55 n=244 | 56+ n=112 |
| School governor | 80 | 6 | 17 | 35 | 22 |
| Not a school governor | 1068 | 466 | 303 | 209 | 90 |
| Don't know | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 1149 | 473 | 320 | 244 | 112 |

Unweighted base = 1149 (weighted by gender and PQE)

3.2 Solicitors' attitudes towards becoming school governors

Those solicitors who had never been school governors were asked about their attitudes towards becoming one in the future. A similar proportion of practitioners either had never thought about doing so (38.7%) or would have liked to pursue involvement in school governance in the future (38.3%). Just below one-third of practitioners were unable to become school governors or were not interested in doing this (28.8%). Chart 1 illustrates the fact that those practitioners who had given a thought to becoming a school governor were more likely to know how to go about doing it, compared to those who had never thought about it: 7.5% of the former group did not know how to go about it against 17.4% of the latter group.

Chart 1: Distribution of solicitors' attitudes towards becoming school governors, %



Unweighted base = 1068 (weighted by gender and PQE)

There was no significant difference between male and female solicitors in their interest in becoming school governors in the future. More males than females stated this was something they were unable or not interested to do: 55.7% of males against 44.3% of females. At the same time female solicitors were less likely to have thought about becoming school governors compared to their male counterparts.

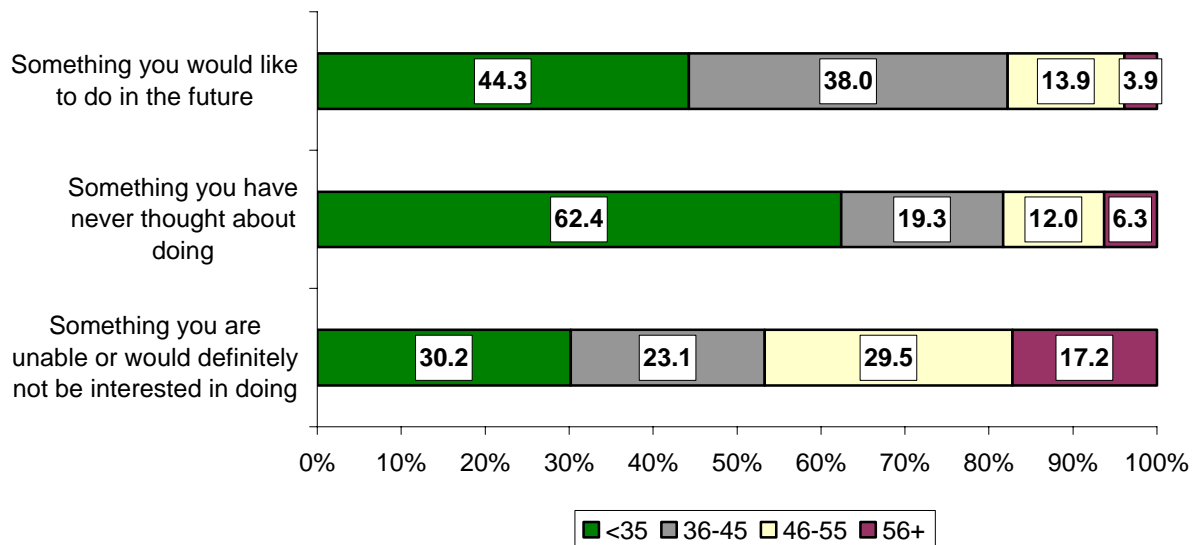
Table 4: Distribution of solicitors' attitudes towards becoming school governors, by gender, %

| Attitudes | Male | Female | Total |
|--|------|--------|-------|
| Something you would like to do in the future, n=409 | 50.5 | 49.5 | 100 |
| Something you have never thought about doing, n=413 | 41.7 | 58.3 | 100 |
| Something you are unable or would definitely not be interested in doing, n=308 | 55.7 | 44.3 | 100 |

Attitudes towards becoming school governors varied with the age of respondents. A higher proportion of younger solicitors had not thought about becoming school governors compared to their older counterparts: 62.4% of those aged under 35 stated that against 6.3% of solicitors over 56 years of age. A similar pattern characterises the relationship between the age and reported interest in becoming school governors: on average 41.2% of solicitors aged under 45 years compared to

only 3.9% of those over 56 years old. Solicitors under 35 years old and between 46-55 years were slightly more likely to be unable or not interested in becoming school governors rather than solicitors of two other age groups.

Chart 2: Distribution of solicitors' attitudes towards becoming school governors, by age group, %



3.3 Solicitors' motivation and skills for becoming school governors

The most common reason (48.1%) for solicitors becoming school governors was an opportunity to be involved in their children's school. A smaller percentage (37.4%) of practitioners stated that they had wanted to put something back into the community. Less commonly cited reasons for solicitors becoming school governors included the fact that they had been asked (18 solicitors) and it was an opportunity to apply legal skills for the better of schools (15 solicitors).

Table 5: Distribution of solicitors' motivation for becoming school governors

| Motivation | Frequency | %¹ |
|--|------------------|----------------------|
| Being involved in my/our children's school | 63 | 48.1 |
| Putting something back into the community | 49 | 37.4 |
| Was asked to do it | 18 | 13.7 |
| Allowing the school to make use of my legal skills | 15 | 11.5 |
| Being interested in/commitment to education | 8 | 6.1 |
| Former pupil of the school | 3 | 2.3 |

Analysing and understanding regulations were the top two skills which helped solicitors in their role as school governors (90.1% of practitioners mentioned them). Also, negotiating skills and drafting appeared to be helpful: 77.1% and 71.8% of solicitors named these skills. Only 5 practitioners stated that their skills, honed in working environment, had not helped them in their role as school governors at all.

Table 6: Distribution of solicitors' skills which helped them to succeed as school governors

| Skills | Frequency | %² |
|--|------------------|----------------------|
| Analysing | 118 | 90.1 |
| Understanding regulations | 118 | 90.1 |
| Negotiating skills | 101 | 77.1 |
| Drafting | 94 | 71.8 |
| General knowledge base (including financial) | 13 | 9.9 |
| Has not helped in role as a governor | 5 | 3.8 |

¹ The percentages do not add up to 100 as the options are not mutually exclusive.

² The percentages do not add up to 100 as the options are not mutually exclusive.

APPENDIX A

METHOD

During October and November 2009, telephone interviews were conducted with senior representatives of 600 private practice firms in England and Wales. The fieldwork for this project was conducted by an independent research agency, Opinion Research Corporation International. The response rate for this fieldwork was 42%³.

A stratified random sample based on partner count was extracted from the Law Society's REGIS database. Larger firms were over sampled to ensure that adequate numbers of responses were obtained to facilitate robust analysis.

Representatives were either a sole practitioner, a senior or managing partner. Where a senior or managing partner was not identifiable, the partner with the most number of post qualification experiences was contacted.

Tables included in this report provide the unweighted number of firms responding and the weighted proportion.

SAMPLE PROFILE

The following tables compare the profile of the sample to the profession generally as reported in the Law Society's Annual statistical report 2009⁴. As noted above, larger firms were over-sampled and over-represented in the sample and smaller firms under-sampled compared to the professions population (Table 1). Table 2 below shows that firms in London, North West, West Midlands and Eastern regions were under-represented compared to the distribution of firms generally. Final data was weighted back to the profile of the profession on the basis of size of firm and Government office region, so that the sample profile matched these two characteristics occurring within the profession.

³ Response rate was calculated thus, number of completed interviews (including pilot) divided by the number of contacts spoken to.

⁴ Trends in the solicitors' profession, Annual statistical report 2009, Cole, Fletcher, Chittenden and Cox, The Law Society

Table 1: Size of firm

| Firm size | Firms in England and Wales ¹ | % of all firms | Number in sample (Unweighted) | % of sample | % point diff |
|----------------|---|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Sole Practices | 4,163 | 40.2 | 230 | 38.3 | -1.9 |
| 2-4 partner | 4,671 | 45.1 | 273 | 37.9 | -7.2 |
| 5-10 partners | 980 | 9.5 | 45 | 7.5 | -2 |
| 11+ partners | 547 | 5.2 | 98 | 16.3 | 11.1 |
| Total | 10,362 | 100 | 38 | 100 | 0 |

Table 2: Location of Firms

| Government Office Region | Firms in England and Wales | % of all firms | Number in sample (Unweighted) | % of sample | % point dif |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| London | 2834 | 27.3 | 140 | 23.3 | -4.0 |
| South East | 1,509 | 14.6 | 115 | 19.1 | 4.5 |
| North West | 1,289 | 12.4 | 55 | 9.2 | -3.2 |
| West Midlands | 829 | 8.0 | 42 | 7.0 | -1.0 |
| South West | 689 | 6.6 | 55 | 9.2 | 2.6 |
| York & Humber | 735 | 7.1 | 44 | 7.3 | 0.2 |
| Eastern | 1,060 | 10.2 | 57 | 9.5 | -0.7 |
| East Midlands | 565 | 5.5 | 43 | 7.2 | 1.7 |
| Wales | 522 | 5.0 | 31 | 5.2 | 0.2 |
| North East | 331 | 3.2 | 19 | 3.2 | 0.0 |
| Total | 10363 | 100 | 601 | 100 | 0.2 |