



THE **LAW SOCIETY**
OF NORTHERN IRELAND



APPOINTMENT OF LAY MEMBERS

**TO UPHOLD PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS WITHIN
THE SOLICITOR PROFESSION IN NORTHERN
IRELAND**

INFORMATION BOOKLET

This material will also be made available on request in other formats such as Braille, large print, audio etc. All reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate the needs of applicants with a disability.

1. BACKGROUND

A recruitment exercise is under way for people who are not lawyers but who are interested in upholding professional standards within the Solicitor profession in Northern Ireland.

The people we wish to appoint ('Lay Members') will serve on one or more of the following bodies which uphold the professional standards of solicitors –

- The Solicitors Complaints Committee;
- The Professional Conduct Committee of the Law Society of Northern Ireland;
- The Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal.

If you believe you can satisfy the responsibilities outlined in this Information Booklet and would like to be considered for one of these appointments, we would encourage you to apply by submitting an Application (details are included in this Booklet). You can apply for appointment to any or all of the above bodies.

Please note that the closing date for applications is Friday 23rd May 2025.

These are important appointments and the persons selected for appointment will receive appropriate induction training.

Lady Chief Justice's Office

Law Society of Northern Ireland

2. THE SOLICITORS COMPLAINTS COMMITTEE

A new Solicitors Complaints Committee will come into operation in September 2025 to consider complaints from clients who are dissatisfied with the service they received from their solicitor.

Where a client is dissatisfied with the service they received they should discuss this with their solicitor. If, having done so, the complaint remains unresolved, the client will be able to refer the complaint to the new Solicitors Complaints Committee.

The Solicitors Complaints Committee will comprise a number of legal and lay members. The Committee will have a number of remedies available where a complaint is upheld.

3. THE PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT COMMITTEE

The Professional Conduct Committee is a Committee of the Law Society of Northern Ireland. The Law Society is responsible for upholding the professional conduct of solicitors in Northern Ireland. Where a solicitor's conduct is being questioned, the matter will be referred to the Professional Conduct Committee for consideration.

The Professional Conduct Committee is chaired by a senior member of the Law Society Council and comprises both legal and lay members.

Where the Professional Conduct Committee makes a finding of professional misconduct against a solicitor it may impose a sanction on the solicitor or, in the most serious cases, refer the solicitor's conduct to the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal (see below).

4. THE SOLICITORS DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL

The Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal is an independent tribunal which deals with cases where a solicitor is accused of professional misconduct.

The Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal is chaired by a qualified lawyer and, from September 2025, will include a majority of Lay Members.

The Tribunal has a range of sanctions available to it where it upholds a complaint against a solicitor. The sanctions in the most serious cases include suspending a solicitor from practice or removing a solicitor from practice.

5. DETAILS OF THE APPOINTMENTS

Roles:	Lay Members to Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal Lay Members to Solicitors Complaints Committee Lay Members to Professional Conduct Committee
Location:	Belfast (some meetings may be in hybrid format but some attendance in person will be required).
Reserve List:	12 months from the date of appointments.
Duration of Appointment:	3 years with the possibility of re-appointment for a further term thereafter.
Workload Commitment:	Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal: 5-10 sittings per annum Solicitors Complaints Committee: 10-20 sittings per annum Professional Conduct Committee: 12-15 meetings per annum. Approx 4 hour meetings. Additional time for reading papers in preparation of meetings will also be required.
Remuneration:	£250 daily sitting fee. Meetings lasting two hours or less £125. *Composite fee for pre and post meeting preparation, as well as meeting attendance.
Expenses:	45 pence per mile or other reasonable travelling (car/bus/rail) and car parking expenses.

6. MAIN DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

The roles require a strong commitment to upholding professional service standards in the Solicitor profession.

The persons appointed are expected to display high standards of integrity and probity, both within and outside of sittings and to treat people fairly.

The successful candidates are also expected to be independent in character and judgement.

The successful candidates should ensure they have sufficient IT resources and skills to consider papers and attend remote meetings where required.

Key Responsibilities:

Decision-Making:

- Contribute to decision-making ensuring that all cases are reviewed fairly, impartially and objectively.
- Contribute to making decisions on complex cases.
- Work collaboratively with other Committee/Tribunal members to ensure sound decision-making.

Governance and Policy:

- Work with Committee/Tribunal Members to ensure appropriate standards of governance are met.

Operational Contribution:

- Work closely with other Committee/Tribunal members and secretariat to contribute to the day-to-day operations, ensuring the efficient, effective and timely handling of complaints.
- Provide mutual support to colleagues and to challenge and respond to being challenged, constructively.

Performance & Reporting:

- Maintain attendance and contribution to the meetings and work of the Committee/Tribunal.

7. PERSON SPECIFICATION

ESSENTIAL

- These appointments are for lay persons. Candidates must not be and must never have been a qualified solicitor or barrister.
- All candidates must be able to demonstrate experience in at least one of the following areas:
 - consumer affairs,
 - complaints handling,
 - accountancy,
 - finance/auditing,
 - human resources,
 - board level experience,
 - disciplinary processes.
- Experience of assimilating and analysing complex information to reach evidence-based decisions as a member of a Committee, Board, or decision-making body.
- The ability to communicate, both orally and in writing, in a clear, succinct and effective manner.
- Direct experience of and an ability to exercise effective corporate governance as a member of a Committee, Board, or decision-making body.
- Ability to engage constructively and effectively with colleagues as part of a team.
- Must be sufficiently available to attend meetings of the Committee and Tribunal as required.

DESIRABLE

- An understanding and experience of regulatory functions in the context of a profession.
- An understanding of the statutory and other frameworks within which Solicitors in Northern Ireland operate.
- Direct experience of conducting an examination of files, documentation or accounts in the context of consumer affairs or complaints handling.

8. SELECTION PROCESS

To apply, candidates must complete an application form which can be found here:

[Lay Member Application Form](#)

Please ensure that you indicate on the application form to which of the three bodies you wish to apply for appointment (you can apply for any or all of the three bodies, however successful candidates will receive one appointment only).

Closing date for receipt of completed applications is Friday 23rd May 2025.

The selection process will include:

- A paper-based short-listing assessment of applications against the criteria outlined in the person specification.
- An interview focused on experience and competence will be undertaken by the Appointment Panel.

All candidates will be notified of the format in advance of each stage to aid their preparation.

Full details will be provided to all candidates in letters of invitation to each stage of the process.

The outcome of each stage of the process will be communicated to each candidate individually and, where requested, feedback will be provided.

A formal offer of appointment will be made to the successful candidates on the satisfactory completion of any pre-appointment checks that are considered by the panel to be required.

As a minimum requirement successful candidates who are offered appointment must provide a Basic Disclosure Certificate issued by AccessNI confirming a clear criminal record check. Further details of this procedure will be provided if your application is successful.

Indicative Timetable of Recruitment

Closing date: Friday 23rd May 2025

Shortlisting Notification: Friday 6th June 2025

Interviews: 13th, 16th, 17th, 23rd and 25th June 2025

Appointment Notification: Week commencing 25th August 2025

Appointments commence: With effect from **1 September 2025**

9.FURTHER INFORMATION

Any queries about this appointment or the selection process should be addressed to apply@lawsoc-ni.org

Legislative Background and Structure

In November 2006 a Legal Services Review Group chaired by Professor Sir George Bain, issued a report to government entitled “Legal Services in Northern Ireland: Complaints, Regulation, Competition.” This report contained recommendations aimed at improving the existing system, primarily in the context of complaints handling by professional bodies.

Subsequently, the Legal Complaints and Regulation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 (the 2016 Act) was introduced following consultation and is intended to be commenced on 1 September 2025. Implementation will bring changes to better assist the consumer and improve the existing regulatory framework. One of the key changes to the current system is to increase the lay membership of the regulatory bodies that are designated to determine complaints against the solicitor’s profession.

Under the new complaints handling system, complaints raised against members of the Solicitor’s profession in Northern Ireland will be delineated as follows:

Lady Chief Justice Appeals and Judicial Review Applications	
Solicitors’ Disciplinary Tribunal (SDT) Receives referrals from the Society’s regulatory Committees and other interested persons against Solicitors.	
Solicitor Complaints Committee	Professional Conduct Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Will replace the current Client Complaints Committee upon commencement of the 2016 Act, save for transitional matters.➤ Investigates and determines complaints raised by a client against their Solicitor, or a beneficiary entitled to the estate or trust being administered by the Solicitor, relating to the adequacy of the professional service provided.➤ Sanctioning and investigative powers granted under Part 3 of the 2016 Act.➤ May refer a Solicitor to the SDT if a complaint is upheld.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Established by the Society in exercise of the powers granted to it by Article 73A of the 1976 Order.➤ Discharges the statutory and regulatory function of the Council of the Law Society of Northern Ireland with respect to the professional practice, conduct and discipline of the Solicitor profession with the aim of protecting the public and in the public interest.➤ Sanctioning and investigative powers granted under Articles 13, 14, 15 and 41B, Part 2, Part 3 and Part 4 of Schedule 1 and Schedule 1A of the 1976 Order.➤ May refer a Solicitor to the SDT for regulatory breaches.

Disability requirements

If you require any reasonable adjustments, due to disability, to enable you to attend any part of the process please contact us. Details of any disability do not form any part of the selection process.

Conflict of interest and due diligence.

What is a conflict of interest?

If there are any issues in your personal or professional history that could, if you were appointed be misconstrued, cause embarrassment or cause public confidence in the appointment to be jeopardised, it is important that you bring them to the attention of the Appointment panel and provide details of the issues(s) in your application.

In considering whether you wish to declare any issues, you should also reflect on any public statements you have made, including through social media. The Panel may wish to explore issues with you before they make a recommendation to appoint.

As part of due diligence checks we will consider anything in the public domain related to your conduct or professional capacity. This will include consideration of any publicly available information which may be made available to the Appointment Panel and they may wish to explore with you, should you be invited for interview.

Public Appointments require the highest standards of propriety, involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity, in relation to the stewardship of public funds and the oversight and management of all related activities. This means that any private, voluntary, charitable or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the body concerned should be declared.

There is always the possibility for real or perceived conflicts of interest to arise. Both are a problem, as the perceived inference of a conflict may, on occasions, be as damaging as the existence of a real conflict.

No-one should use, or give the appearance of using, their public position to further their private interests. This is an area of particular importance, as it is of considerable concern to the public and receives a lot of media attention. It is important, therefore, that you consider your circumstances when applying for a public appointment and identify any potential conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived.

Surely a perceived conflict is not a problem, as long as I act impartially at all times?

The integrity of the individual is not in question here. However, it is necessary for the standing of the individual and the board that members of the public have confidence in their independence and impartiality. Even a perceived conflict of interest on the part of a board member can be extremely damaging to the body's reputation and it is therefore essential that these are declared and explored, in the same way as an actual conflict would be. The fact that a member acted impartially may be no defence against accusations of potential bias.

What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest?

You will find a section on conflicts of interest in the application form for you to complete. This asks you to consider and declare whether or not you have a real, or perceived, conflict. If you are unsure if your circumstances constitute a possible conflict, you should still complete this section, in order to give the Selection Panel as much information as possible.

If I declare a conflict, does this mean I will not be considered for appointment?

No - each case is considered individually. If you are short-listed for interview, the Panel will explore with you how far the conflict might affect your ability to contribute effectively and impartially on the Board and how this might be handled, if you were to be appointed. For example, it may be possible to arrange for you to step out of meetings where an issue is discussed, in which you have an interest. However, if, following the discussion with you, the Panel believes that the conflict is too great and would call into question the probity of the Board or the appointment; they can recommend the withdrawal of your application from the competition.

What happens if I do not declare a known conflict, which is then discovered by the Department after my appointment?

Again, each case would be considered on its merits, but the Department relevant appointing body may take the view that by concealing a conflict of interest, you would be deemed to have breached the Seven Principles of Conduct Underpinning Public Life and may terminate your appointment.

What happens if I do not realise a potential conflict exists?

This situation may arise where the applicant is not familiar with the broad range of work which a body covers and therefore does not realise that a conflict might exist. In some cases, the Panel, with their wider knowledge of the body, might deduce that there is a potential conflict issue, based on the information on employment and experience provided by the candidate in the application form. They will then explore this at interview with the candidate.

What happens if a conflict of interest arises after an appointment is made?

This could arise for two main reasons. The first is that the member's circumstances may change, for example, they may change jobs and in doing so, a conflict with their work on the board becomes apparent. The second is where a member is unfamiliar with the range of the work of the body, but after appointment, it becomes clear that a conflict exists where none had been envisaged during the appointment process.

In both cases, the issue should be discussed with the Chair of the board regulatory entity and the Chief Executive of the appointing body concerned, in consultation with the Sponsoring Department, to decide whether or not the member can continue to carry out their role in an appropriate manner, each case is considered individually.

It may be that the conflict is such that it would be impractical for the member to continue

on the board, if they would have to withdraw from a considerable amount of the body's routine business. In such cases, the member may be asked to stand down from the body.

Note for applicants: Whilst these are not public appointments, the relevant appointing bodies have adopted the following guidance for the purpose of appointing lay members of the Committees/Tribunal.

PROBITY & CONFLICTS OF INTEREST GUIDANCE FOR CANDIDATES

This information should be read in conjunction with the Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland "Guidance on Conflicts of Interest and Integrity and How to Raise a Complaint".

Standards of behaviour

Ministers expect that the conduct of those they appoint to serve on the Boards of public bodies will be above reproach.

The Seven Principles Underpinning Public Life

In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life defined seven principles, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way. These are:

Selflessness: Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or other friends.

Integrity: Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity: In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability: Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness: Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty: Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership: Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.