



- ▶ **Diversity,**
- ▶ **Equality** and
- ▶ **Inclusion**

Strategy 2024-28



THE
LAW SOCIETY
OF NORTHERN IRELAND

100
YEARS

► **Diversity,**
► **Equality** and
► **Inclusion**

Strategy 2024-28

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▶ Introduction

The Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) Strategy outlines a series of commitments for the Law Society ('the Society') in 2024 and beyond. As the professional body for the solicitor profession in Northern Ireland, with both regulatory and representative functions, the Society is committed to developing a profession that is reflective of the communities which our solicitors serve.

This Strategy was developed in conjunction with the Society's Human Rights and Equality Committee. Views were sought from the profession via a 'Call for Views' exercise on a draft version of the Strategy. This was an opportunity for members of the profession to provide their views on how to tackle the many ongoing challenges and

to help shape the Strategy. Submissions provided have been taken on board and the draft Strategy has been updated to reflect the feedback received.

This DEI Strategy sets out the Society's ongoing commitment to achieve progress and builds upon the actions delivered to date through our 2022 Action Plan¹. While progress has been made to date, many challenges remain, and there is recognition that a concerted, long-term effort is required in this work. This multi-year Strategy sets out a range of actions which over time aims to deliver meaningful improvement in the diversity, equality and equity of the solicitor profession in Northern Ireland.

¹ https://www.lawsoc-ni.org/DatabaseDocs/new_877715___new8345688diversityandequality200922poc.pdf

► Progress to Date

The Law Society of Northern Ireland ('the Society') completed its first ever Diversity and Equality survey of the solicitor profession in Northern Ireland in 2021, which received over 1,200 responses. Findings helped the Society better understand what the profession looks like and demonstrated the changing nature of the solicitor profession.

The findings of the survey were presented to and considered by the Society's Council, which identified two key areas as initial priorities:

- **Improving the experience of women in the solicitor profession.**
- **Improving access to the profession for under-represented groups.**

Following the identification of the above two priority areas, two Working Groups were established to consider the issues highlighted and develop actions to address them.

The Society published its 'Diversity and Equality Study of the Northern Ireland Solicitor Profession' at its Centenary Conference in September 2022, along with a corresponding Action Plan.

Since the publication of the report, we have undertaken a range of Diversity and Equality initiatives to address the issues and challenges highlighted within the study, including:

- **Delivering the Centenary Bursary, which funded IPLS fees for two students.**
- **Re-launching the Society's Mentoring Programme in 2023, with the 2024 Mentoring Programme now underway.**
- **Conducting an extensive research project with women who have left private practice, the results of which were published alongside the Call for Views exercise on the draft Strategy².**

- **Publishing a new careers bulletin containing information on how to become a solicitor in Northern Ireland.**
- **Delivering guest lectures to undergraduate students and attending careers events to promote the solicitor career.**

Furthermore, the Society became a Signatory of Diversity Mark and obtained their Bronze Accreditation in 2023 which demonstrates a public commitment to advancing diversity and inclusion within the organisation and wider solicitor profession in Northern Ireland.

² <https://www.lawsoc-ni.org/law-societys-draft-diversity-equality-and-inclusion>

► Vision and Objectives

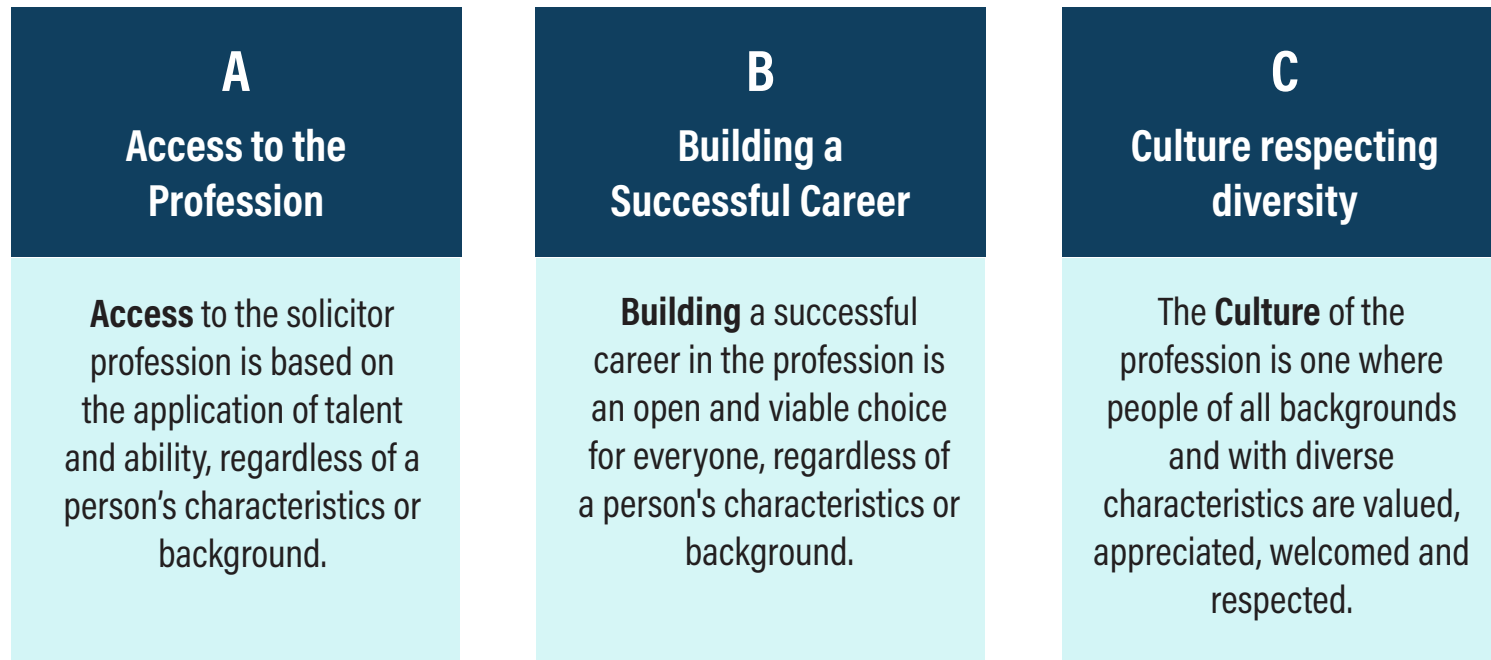
The vision for the Society's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy is:

“To achieve an equal, diverse, inclusive and equitable solicitor profession in Northern Ireland, which is open and accessible to all, and reflective of the society solicitors serve.”

The Law Society, its members, and member firms will play a critical role in achieving our vision. The Society will therefore work collaboratively with its members to ensure that firms and organisations are educated and supported in embedding this work.

The purpose of this Strategy is to set the overarching roadmap towards delivering our vision.
The Strategy therefore identifies three Strategic Objectives which, if they were to be achieved, would represent success.

These are:



► Measuring progress

It is important to measure progress on the change achieved through implementing the planned actions.

The Diversity and Equality survey undertaken by the Society in 2022 provides an important baseline. We plan to undertake follow up Diversity and Equality surveys every three years to measure changes against the baseline established by the first survey conducted in 2022.

We will continue to monitor data already available to the Society in its role as the professional body for the solicitor profession to monitor and record trends on areas such as entry to the profession, career progression and movement into and out of practice areas etc.

This data collected as part of our “business as usual” activity will also need to be supplemented by other sources of information. To this end, we will consider what additional information the Society can collect through its activities. These methods will provide evidence on the impact of actions implemented and overall progress being made towards the Strategic objectives.

The Society will monitor the participation rates of diverse groups, including those grouped by reference to their religious belief, political opinion, race, age, marital status, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability status, responsibility for dependents, and socio-economic status.

Some key measures the Society will look to monitor include:

- Participation rates within the profession
- Participation rates in leadership positions in the profession
- Number of DEI training and events sessions
- Number of participants/attendees at DEI training and events
- Number of firms adopting flexible working arrangements
- Gender pay gap monitoring



► Reporting

Progress on delivering the Action Plan will be overseen by the Human Rights and Equality Committee, with input from other Committees including the Education and Future of the Profession Committees. Updates will be provided internally to the Human Rights and Equality Committee at each of its meetings (which generally take place on a 6-weekly basis). An update will be provided to the Society's Council at least annually, with more regular updates as and when required.

Reports on the progress on the actions will also be provided to members on a regular process through the Society's regular communication platforms to ensure accountability and transparency. This will include (but is not limited to) formal updates on a twice-yearly basis through the Human Rights and Equality Committee's bulletin.

The Action Plan will remain under review and will be updated or developed when necessary to reflect changes and best practice.

► Action Plan

The below Action Plan sets out a series of planned actions that are considered priorities over the period 2024-28.

The Action Plan will be kept under review as progress is made and will be updated as necessary.

Key Theme	Priority Areas of Focus	Key Stakeholders	Timeframe	Measuring success/ what will success look like?
Access to the Profession	We will continue to build awareness of the solicitor profession as a desirable career choice through a structured programme of engagement at Secondary School level, engaging young people from diverse backgrounds.	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Local secondary schools (grammar and non-grammar)	Ongoing	Number of schools engaged (including type e.g. Grammar, Comprehensive etc.) Number of school students engaged
	We will continue to work in partnership with schools and universities to support careers departments and modules to assist with the delivery of work experience programmes, careers development initiatives and events.	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Regional Solicitor Associations, Universities, Local secondary schools (grammar and non-grammar)	Ongoing	Number of schools engaged (including type e.g. Grammar, Comprehensive etc.) Number of school students engaged Numbers of undergrad students engaged
	We will develop links with Further Education Colleges to increase awareness of the solicitor profession as a desirable career choice and undertake relevant engagement initiatives.	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Further Education Colleges	To commence 2025	Number of FE colleges engaged Number of FE students engaged
	We will offer the 'Centenary Bursary' on an annual basis to cover the IPLS fees of student(s) commencing their traineeship based on financial circumstances and background eligibility criteria.	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Institute for Professional Legal Studies, Trainee solicitors	To take place annually 2024-28	Amount of support provided (£) Number of trainees supported Evaluation Report including feedback from recipient(s)

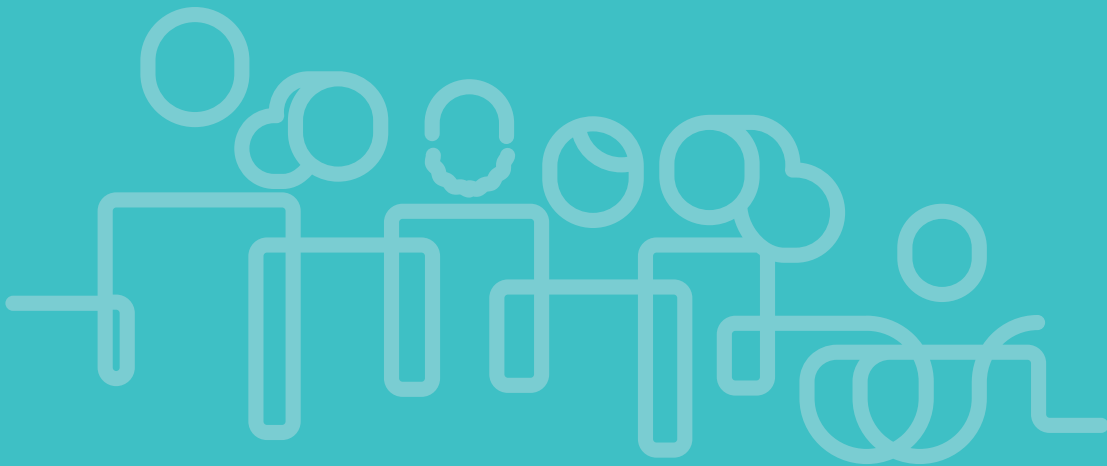
Key Theme	Priority Areas of Focus	Key Stakeholders	Timeframe	Measuring success/ what will success look like?
	We will consider the feasibility of introducing a traineeship grant/funding for small and/or rural practices as part of the review of Education and trainee arrangements.	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Government Departments, Solicitor Profession	To commence 2024 (subject to funding)	Amount of support provided (£) Number of trainees supported Evaluation Report including feedback from recipients
Building a Successful Career	We will build on the success of the first year of the Society's refreshed mentoring programme to promote mentors from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences and will consider a compulsory element for trainees/newly qualified solicitors (on an opt-out basis).	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Regional Solicitors Associations, Solicitor Profession	To take place annually 2024 - 2028	Number of trainees / solicitors mentored Participant satisfaction measures
	We will implement the recommendations contained in the research report on why women have left private practice.	Policy and Engagement Department, Human Rights and Equality Committee	Publish 2024 Implementation 2024 - 2028	Delivery of recommendations
	We will launch a new Female Leaders Programme, which will include mentoring opportunities, targeted CPD and networking events for women in the profession to come together, share learning and develop their skills to benefit career progression.	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Regional Solicitor Associations, Solicitor Profession	To commence 2024	Number of participants enrolled Number of participants completing course Participant satisfaction measures
	We will work to promote flexible, part-time and alternative working patterns and arrangements, increasing career opportunities for members and increasing our firms' access to talent.	Professional Development Department, Member Services Department, External organisations, Solicitor Profession	To commence 2025	Number of part-time, flexible and alternative pattern jobs promoted

Key Theme	Priority Areas of Focus	Key Stakeholders	Timeframe	Measuring success/ what will success look like?
	We will review trainee pay parity as part of the wider review of Education and trainee arrangements.	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Solicitor Profession	Review in 2024	Measures in place
Culture Respecting Diversity	We will establish a direct point of contact within the Society to raise relevant diversity and equality related issues.	Policy and Engagement Department, Human Rights and Equality Committee,	To commence 2024	Number of approaches / queries made Number of individuals supported
	We will supplement the online Diversity and Equality Toolkit with additional policies and guidance and promote adoption. The Toolkit will be embedded within the planned 'Business Hub' on the Society's new website.	Policy and Engagement Department, Member Services Department, Sustainable Practices Group, Solicitor Profession, Equality Commission, Legal Island	To commence 2024	Numbers accessing toolkit / embedding
	We will deliver DEI related training and events as part of the Society's CPD Programme in partnership with experts in the field.	Professional Development Department, Member Services Department, Legal Island, Solicitor Profession	To commence 2024	Number of events Numbers attending events Feedback from attendees
	We will work with universities and the IPLS to bring forward DEI related training within their learning programmes.	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Universities, Institute for Professional Legal Studies, Trainee Solicitors	To commence 2024	Curriculum changes Number of sessions delivered
	We will consider how DEI can be embedded into the Practice Management Course.	Professional Development Department, Education Committee, Solicitor Profession	Review in 2024 Implementation 2025	Participant satisfaction measures

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	We will continue to work with Diversity Mark to retain the Bronze Accreditation and work towards Silver Accreditation.	Policy and Engagement Department, Diversity Mark, Solicitor Profession	Next assessment 2024	Retain Bronze Accreditation (2024) Attain Silver Accreditation (2025)
	We will consider how firms can be incentivised to engage with and apply for DEI Accreditation.	Policy and Engagement Department, Diversity Mark, Solicitor Profession	To commence 2025	Number of newly accredited firms
	We will review – and where appropriate, revise – Law Society policy in relation to Professional Indemnity Insurance for part-time working.	Member Services Department, Professional Liability Committee	Review 2024 Implementation 2025	Change in Policy Participation in new arrangements

► Conclusion

It is hoped that delivery of the actions within the Strategy will enable steps to be taken to build a more diverse, equal, and equitable profession, which is representative of the makeup of today's society. Creating an inclusive culture in which everyone can thrive, and embracing differences is essential for ensuring the continuing success of the solicitor profession in Northern Ireland.





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