

News release

Representation in law firms improving, but more to do

30 March 2020

Levels of diversity within the legal sector workforce continue to slowly improve, although it varies depending on firm size and level of seniority. The apparent unwillingness of employees to declare they have a disability continues.

Based on information from 186,000 people working at 9,500 law firms across England and Wales, our latest data on firm diversity shows that nearly half of all solicitors are now women (49%) up 1% since 2017.

However, the number varies significantly with seniority, with just one in three (34%) of partners female, compared to women accounting for 59% of solicitors working at non-partner level.

While the proportion of Asian solicitors has increased from 9% to 15% over the past five years, this figure falls to 5% among the larger firms. Among the wider UK workforce the proportion of Asian employees is 7%. The overall proportion of black solicitors (3%) is broadly in line with the over general population.

There has been a steady change over the past five years in the proportion of solicitors attending fee paying schools - marginally down each year - with 21% of all solicitors now having attended fee paying schools, rising to 32% in the larger law firms, which compares to just 7% in the general population.

A greater proportion of solicitors had parents with a degree level qualification (51%) compared to 27% of other staff working in law firms. And 15% of lawyers had a parent who worked in one of the traditional professions (such as accountancy and legal) compared to 8% of the other staff in law firms.

The latest figures have also shown a potential under reporting of disabilities within the profession with just 3% of solicitors who responded to the survey describing themselves as disabled. This is significantly below the Government's 13% figure for the wider UK workforce.

This potentially suggests a culture where disabled solicitors are not coming forward and therefore accessing adjustments which could be made within the workplace to benefit both themselves and the service they provide to clients.

Paul Philip, SRA Chief Executive, said: "A diverse and inclusive legal profession which reflects the wider community is not only good for the public but for legal businesses themselves.

"That is why it is encouraging to see progress continuing across many areas, although there is clearly much more work to be done."

A comparison tool [<https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/diversity-toolkit/law-firm-diversity-tool-2/>] is available which allows firms to benchmark how they compare to similar firms in the profession.

View more detail on the findings [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/diversity-profession/diverse-legal-profession/>] .

Coinciding with the release of its latest diversity data we have also published a five-year review [<https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/research-publications/promote-equality-five-year-summary/>] of its work relating to promoting to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the profession. As well as detailing past activity and achievements, the review also outlines our key EDI priorities for the future.