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GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME

Our first Gender Equality Scheme, to meet the new statutory duties, has now been published. To download a copy of the scheme please click [here](#) to be taken to the list of Strategy documents

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ANNUAL REPORT

The first annual report on our integrated Equality and Diversity Strategy has now been published. To download a copy of the report please click [here](#) to be taken to the list of Strategy documents

DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

Our first Disability Equality Scheme, to meet the new statutory duties, has now been published. To download a copy of the scheme please click [here](#) to be taken to the list of Strategy documents



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EDUCATION CONSULTATION – POSSIBLE BARRIERS TO BECOMING A SOLICITOR EXPLORED

The Society has launched the largest ever research and evidence gathering exercise into education and training in the Scottish legal professions. This is an exciting opportunity for everyone with an interest to be able to contribute to and shape the future plans of the Society in relation to how solicitors are trained.

It is an ambitious and complex task, covering a range of routes to qualification (from full-time and part-time LLBs to the Society's exams) that can take from five to seven years as well as examining the full practising life of a solicitor. Despite this, a system has been designed that should allow everyone the chance to easily register their views on some key 'overview' topics in as little as twenty minutes, and then choose whether or not to get involved in more detail in relation to stages which might be of particular interest to them.

Invitations to respond have been specifically targeted to, among others, groups such as the Scottish Discrimination Law Association, the three Equality Commissions, charities working in the disability sector, and individuals who have had previous contact with the society over access issues. In such invitations we have stressed that with everything under review this is a unique opportunity to tackle any issues or potential barriers for people in relation to any of the 'strands' of equality. Absolutely anyone is welcome to respond and we would encourage you to get involved.

The consultation website can be accessed by clicking [here](#)



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SERVICE ACCESSIBILITY REVIEW

On the 20th September the Society held a Service Accessibility Review, which saw directors and staff from different departments engage with members of the public with a range of disabilities, in order to assess how the Society can better meet their needs.

The Society's Head of Diversity, Neil Stevenson, said:

"This is an important step in our preparation for the new Disability Equality Duties, which will come into force in December 2006. The Society is committed to ensuring that our services are accessible to all members of the public, and of the profession."

The project was managed for the Society by the [Inclusion Development Partnership](#), any organisation considering work in this field is welcome to contact the Society to discuss our positive experience of working with this dedicated team.

The event was covered in the Society's Journal, click [here](#) to read the article

The full report, 'Service Access Review', can be downloaded from menu to the right of this page



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PROFILING THE PROFESSION - OVER 3000 RETURNS

Over 3000 lawyers, around a third of the profession, have taken part in a nationwide survey of solicitors in Scotland.

The project follows the highly successful Women in the Profession study in 2005, which looked at how women are represented within the legal profession in Scotland, and examines just who makes up the country's legal profession and any prevailing attitudes.

Neil Stevenson, Deputy Director of Education and Training at the Law Society of Scotland, who also heads up equality and diversity for the Society, said: "This is a fantastic result, and a far better response rate than many others carrying out similar research in other fields have been able to achieve.

"We're delighted that so many solicitors have taken time-out to fill in a detailed set of questions, giving us a superb set of evidence to act on in the future. For the first time we will have real insight into those working in the profession."

As well as collecting data on race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, religion and belief, and age, the profile project examines the socio-economic background of those entering the profession and their parents. The survey also looks head on at some of the assumptions held about and within the legal profession, with solicitors asked if they agree or disagree with statements such as 'Law is a 'macho' profession', 'Being openly gay makes it harder to attract clients' and 'A person's race affects their progression'.

Stevenson said: "This will allow us to gauge the reactions of the profession, but more importantly, to map who in the profession holds these views. Getting a depth of understanding about the attitudes held, and which groups hold them, through an anonymous questionnaire will allow us to most effectively tackle any real issues identified and the perceptions people may hold about the profession."



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The results will be used for a range of different purposes – from the targeting of careers advice and support and examining how well the profession represents the public it works for, to setting challenges for firms and employers to examine issues within their own organisations and to check that the Society’s work addresses the views of the various groups which make up the profession.

By 2011, the Society has already predicted it will have more female members than male and the results from this project will help identify other changes and where resources should be invested to promote the continuing growth and development of the profession.

The results of the study will be announced in November this year and will be available publicly through the Society’s website.



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PROFILING THE PROFESSION

Between the 12th and 17th of May all solicitors in Scotland will receive a copy of a new questionnaire from the Society aimed at creating a full demographic profile of the profession and supporting our Equality and Diversity work.

Over a year ago the Society carried out the Women in the Legal Profession Project; which received a huge response, has gained us praise from the EOC and other outside agencies for addressing issues, and has meant we now have a hard evidence base as opposed to perception and supposition. Building on this success we now want a full picture of the profession the Society serves and regulates.

This project is not just about meeting statutory requirements – it is about the future of the profession and particularly relevant at a time when the Society is under scrutiny.

We would be grateful if all solicitors completed and returned this research questionnaire (we give you seven good reasons why it is important below) and are happy to provide further information to the profession or public on this project. The questionnaire can also be downloaded from the link 'Profile Questionnaire' in the menu to the right of this page.

7 GOOD REASONS TO TAKE PART

You're busy, you might not be a fan of questionnaires, and you don't like some of our questions – we're still asking you to help, and here are seven good reasons why:

1. To continue to attract the brightest and best people to the profession – ensuring there are opportunities and being able to promote a modern, vibrant profession
2. To work for you, we need to understand you – the Society represents solicitors and that means knowing something about who you are and what you want from the Society
3. To maintain respect from clients, the public and policy makers we need to make sure that we are accessible and viewed as a modern, forward-looking profession



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4. To make the best decisions through informed debate & taking account of a range of views, which means knowing what diverse skills, interests, and knowledge we can bring to the table
5. To break down stereotypes – by 2011 the ‘average’ lawyer will be young & female, yet the public perception is more ‘Rumpole of the Bailey’, we need facts to prove where we stand as a profession
6. To meet our legal commitments under the equalities legislation – non-compliance could cost the profession in terms of PR and legal expense
7. To challenge people – a few of the questions may seem quite personal but we had to collect some of this data to meet new ‘public sector duties’ – and we didn’t want to shy away from asking, or risk perpetuating a taboo by not asking, questions relating to all the areas covered by equality legislation



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DIVERSITY IN LAW FIRMS - LONDON EVENT

This event explores how broadening access and attracting a diverse workforce impacts positively on your bottom line.

In-house counsel, leading firms and diversity professionals will share practical experiences of how implementing a diversity policy can deliver a return for your firm.

The Law Society of Scotland will be presenting on its 'Women in the Legal Profession' and 'Profiling the Profession' projects.



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THE SOCIETY - DOING THE DUTY

The Disability Rights Commission launched the Disability Equality Duty Statutory Code of Practice for Scotland today (Thursday 9 March) at the Scottish Parliament.

Society staff were present to support the launch and ensure the profession continues to strive to tackle issues of equality and discrimination. The Society is covered by the legislation and will be working to deliver its duties as well as promoting the concepts within the profession as a whole.

A Society spokesperson commented "being invited to events such as these is a fantastic opportunity to get expert insight from enthusiastic individuals who have actually been involved in the design and roll out of the duties. They are also a great chance to network with colleagues in the field and share ideas. We know we have work to do, but you come away from meetings such as this enthused, better informed and ready for the challenge."

The full DRC press release can be viewed on the DRC website

You can link to the DRC 'Do the Duty' website, containing further information on the new duties, from the homepage of their website



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ANNUAL REPORT – EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY UPDATE

The Annual Report and Accounts of the Society were approved at the AGM on Friday 17th March 2006.

The report includes a section on Equality and Diversity, covering some of the key achievements in the preceding period. This shouldn't be confused with the Equality Annual Report that will be published in November to meet our responsibilities under legislation such as the Race Relations Amendment Act, however it does provide a useful update on some of the work we have undertaken.



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SEMI FINALISTS DEBATE: THIS HOUSE WOULD EDUCATE DISABLED CHILDREN IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Continuing the equality theme of this year's Schools Debating Competition sixteen teams from around Scotland debated this topic at the end of February.

Neil Stevenson, Deputy Director of Education and Training, said "this was another hugely enjoyable and informative motion to judge – the students engaged with the topic and showed a huge capacity to understand the multiple policy and personal issues involved in education and the needs and rights of disabled fellow students"

The Disability Rights Commission added "The DRC is currently running the Disability Debate to change people's preconceptions of disability and set a new agenda on disability in Scotland. We have highlighted ten critical issues, including education, that government must address if we are to make equality a reality for Scotland's one million disabled people.

Getting young people to recognise and discuss such issues is vital if there is to be an better understanding of equality and disability in the future. We are pleased to see teams having engaged with this complex topic and wish those get through to the next round the best of luck."

4 teams progressed to the final, to be held in June.

More information on the debating competition can be obtained from the Tournament Manager



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150 SCHOOLS TEAMS TO DEBATE INCITEMENT OF RELIGIOUS HATRED LAWS

Working with schools and young people to further their understanding of legal rights and responsibilities is a key part of the work of the Society. This November will see over 150 schools teams, our largest numbers of entrants ever, debate the topic:

This House would make the incitement of religious hatred illegal

Neil Stevenson, Deputy Director of Education and Training, said “this was a fantastic opportunity to link the launch of our Equality and Diversity Strategy, which covers issues of race and religion, to promoting better understanding of these complex issues in schools. We are delighted at the number of entering teams, which cover Scotland from the Western Isles to the Scottish Borders. I am looking forward to going to heats to judge, and have never walked away from these events without a new angle or interpretation which young people so often seem to be able to bring.”

The Scottish Inter Faith Council commented, “There’s been a lot of discussion by both faith communities and politicians around the incitement of religious hatred and whether the best way to tackle this is through creating a specific criminal offence, with Scotland taking a different approach from England and Wales. It’s been a difficult and sometimes controversial issue and the Scottish Inter Faith Council is glad to see this kind of discussion being encouraged in schools. It is vitally important that young people engage with debates that affect the kind of society we want to live in.”

More information on the debating competition can be obtained from the Tournament Manager



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THE LAUNCH OF THE RESULTS FROM OUR RESEARCH INTO 'WOMEN IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION'

Over 2300 solicitors in Scotland contributed to this independent research (funded by the Society and the Equal Opportunities Commission), a tremendous response to a postal questionnaire. There is a mix of data from male and female solicitors, different age groups, and covering both private practice (small and large firms) and in-house sectors. We have feedback on careers and aspirations, salaries, development opportunities and a range of other employment factors.

The findings make fascinating reading and are likely to stimulate debate in the whole profession about a range of issues; the final report will prove must read information for those involved in the management and human resources aspects of law firms and organisations employing solicitors.

The findings will be available from Wednesday 9th November 2005 in the panel to the right of this page

Below are links to the three organisations which worked in partnership to carry out this research



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EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY THEME TO NOVEMBER'S JOURNAL

November 2005 sees the official Journal of the Law Society of Scotland taking on an Equality and Diversity theme.

Articles cover the findings from the recent 'Women in the Legal Profession' Project as well as the response from the Society and the Equal Opportunities Commission to this research.

With remuneration being one of the topics raised by the research we see another article introducing the idea of job evaluation and pointing out some of the benefits this can bring.

A final set of articles introduce the Society's strategy in relation to Equality and Diversity and provide comment from large and small firms on what this may mean for them.

The magazine can be viewed online, free of charge, at the [Journal's website](#). Simply look for the November 2005 edition.