

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

LSB PROPOSALS TO INCREASE TRANSPARENCY OF DIVERSITY OF LEGAL WORKFORCE

EQUALITY CHARITIES BACK REGULATOR IN PUTTING THE SPOTLIGHT ON DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

The Legal Services Board (LSB) has today announced [proposals](#) that would see all law firms and barristers chambers in England and Wales gathering and publishing data about the diversity of their workforce - encompassing all personnel from partners to support staff and all levels between.

Existing data and research illustrates that there are still significant barriers to progression and retention for practitioners, and diminishing representation for lawyers from non-traditional backgrounds at the highest levels of the profession. For example, just 25% of partners in solicitors firms are women and 3.5% of partners in the top 150 firms are black or minority ethnic.

The proposals come as part of the LSB's focus on increasing the diversity of the legal services workforce and ensuring the legal profession is open to prospective lawyers from non-traditional backgrounds. The promotion of a diverse legal profession is a major strand of the modernisation programme for legal services enacted by Parliament through the Legal Services Act 2007 – the most wide-ranging set of reforms for legal services across England and Wales for decades. The proposals for increased transparency, alongside other measures, have been released for consultation today.

The starting point for the LSB is that the data should encompass all of the characteristics relevant to the new public sector equality duty (age, race, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, sex, pregnancy and maternity and sexual orientation), plus socio-economic background.

It will remain voluntary for individuals to respond to the diversity questions. Legal services providers will simply be required to publish the anonymised results of their diversity surveys (even

if there is no response or the response is “prefer not to say”) and report it to their regulator. This will create competitive pressure among providers to take action to increase diversity and attract the best talent, and will also enable the regulators in the sector to get a clearer picture of levels of diversity in the workforce. Over time, changes and trends will also enable the regulators to assess the impact of initiatives designed to widen access and improve retention and progression of lawyers from non-traditional backgrounds.

David Edmonds, Chairman of the Legal Services Board said:

Whilst there has been positive work on widening access to the legal profession, there are apparent continuing inequalities. Through these measures there will be greater transparency and sharper scrutiny by regulators and consumers based on published data. Appropriate policies can then be developed on the basis of the evidence we collect.

The leaders of a range of equality charities have backed the proposals, including: Age UK, MENCAP, the Fawcett Society, the RNIB, Sense, Scope, the Lesbian and Gay Foundation, Operation Black Vote, the Sutton Trust, RADAR and the Disability Law Service.

For more information or interview requests please contact Craig Jones, Media and Public Affairs Manager at the LSB on craig.jones@legalservicesboard.org.uk or by calling 020 7271 0068 / 07702 428210

Notes for editors:

1. The consultation document setting out the policy can be found at http://www.legalservicesboard.org.uk/what_we_do/consultations/open/index.htm . Those with an interest in legal services regulation are encouraged to comment on the proposals by 9 March 2011.
2. The LSB has carried out a workforce diversity survey on its own team, the results of which have been published at http://www.legalservicesboard.org.uk/about_us/our_staff/our_diversity/index.htm

3. The Legal Services Act ('The Act') provides for the creation of the Legal Services Board as the oversight regulator for legal services in England and Wales. The new regulatory regime enacted by the Act became fully active on 1 January 2010.

4. The LSB oversees eight "Approved Regulators", which in turn regulate individual lawyers and organisations. The eight approved regulators, designated under Part 1 of Schedule 4 of the 2007 Act, are the Law Society, the Bar Council, the Master of the Faculties, the Institute of Legal Executives, the Council for Licensed Conveyancers, the Chartered Institute of Patent Attorneys, the Institute of Trade Mark Attorneys and the Association of Law Costs Draftsmen.

In addition the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Scotland and the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants are listed as Approved Regulators in relation only to reserved probate activities.

5. Section 1 of the Act defines 8 Regulatory Objectives shared by the LSB and the Approved Regulators. The sixth of these directly concerns the diversity of the legal services workforce. The full range of Regulatory Objectives includes:
 - Protecting and promoting the public interest
 - Supporting the constitutional principle of the rule of law
 - Improving access to justice
 - Protecting and promoting the interests of consumers of legal services
 - Promoting competition in the delivery of legal services
 - Encouraging an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession
 - Increasing public understanding of the citizen's legal rights and duties
 - Promoting and maintaining adherence to the professional principles

6. The legal profession currently consists of some 16,455 barristers, 112,246 solicitors and 12,200 individuals authorised to operate in other aspects of the legal profession such as conveyancing. The sector has been valued at £25.97 billion per annum. In total the legal sector employed 323,000 individuals in 2008. [ONS]

7. The 2010-11 LSB business plan can be found at:
http://www.legalservicesboard.org.uk/news_publications/publications/index.htm