



Association of Women Solicitors

Essential for Success

Consultation on LSB Draft Strategic and Business Plans 2015/18.

Response on behalf of Association of Women Solicitors, London

Having read the 46 page document we were disappointed to see just 3 short paragraphs on Equality even though the encouragement of a strong, *diverse* and effective legal profession is one of your main regulatory objectives.

That said we look forward to further engaging with you on your stated business objectives of further promoting equality and diversity, ensuring your decisions take account of all relevant equality and diversity information and ensuring that your own practices and procedures focus on equality and diversity issues.

In the meantime we are pleased to note that Diversity Questionnaires have now been introduced by the SRA for solicitors' firms.

We do however wish to make some points of concern to women solicitors.

Firstly we note that information is not being requested about earnings and ask whether anything further has been done on that since your February 2013 Review on the equal pay gap.

There is also no question about use of flexible working or maternity leave and we would welcome the collection of statistics and monitoring of both those and diversity at partnership/member level.

We would furthermore like the Plan to consider adopting targets for eg percentages of male and females at partner/member level, women returning from maternity leave and solicitors embracing flexible working.

May we also flag the issue of lost talent. Theme A of the Consultation is based on barriers to growth. One barrier to growth is the loss of fully qualified women lawyers. Perhaps in the SRA questionnaire there could be an enquiry to find out whether a solicitor has had a career break to actually monitor how many female solicitors return to the profession after such breaks.

Once women leave the profession it is very difficult to get back in. In other professions such as nursing there are clear pathways to return. If the LSB is determined to move with the times and acknowledge the different emerging business models and markets perhaps the Board should also ensure that it encourages clearer pathways (returnships) back to law for

those on career breaks.

We ask what further progress has been made following the recommendation in your July 2011 paper (“Increasing Diversity and Mobility in the Legal Workforce”) that approved regulators consider further investigation of the impact of pregnancy and maternity and in particular the impact on the retention and progression of women in the legal workforce.

Finally we ask if the issue of a pro rata practising certificate fee for solicitors who work part time could be revisited.

Association of Women Solicitors, London
February 2015

About Association of Women Solicitors, London

Association of Women Solicitors, London was founded in 1992 and its aims include representing, supporting and developing the interests of women solicitors. Membership is open to all women solicitors and trainees and associate membership to other women lawyers including barristers, legal executives and paralegals.

Further information can be found on our website <http://www.awslondon.co.uk>