



News release

Diversity in the profession continues to improve, but more to do

01 February 2022

Diversity within law firms is continuing to slowly improve year-on-year, with smaller firms increasingly more diverse than larger ones.

These are among the key findings we have published following our latest collection of diversity data from more than 8,700 law firms employing more than 180,000 people across England and Wales.

There is an increase in the proportion of women in the profession (up slightly to 52%) and although the seniority gap between female partners and solicitors remains significant, it narrowed slightly. The pace of change is slower in the larger firms. Women make up 61% of solicitors (no change since 2019) and 35% of partners overall (up from 34%). In the largest law firms, women make up only 31% of partners.

In terms of ethnicity, we found that 17% of lawyers working across all firms were of Black, Asian or minority ethnic origin, up around 0.5% since 2019. However, there is a widening gap in the profile of partners in the large and small firms, with just 8% of partners at the largest firms being Black, Asian or ethnic origin, compared to 23% at firms with two to five partners, and 35% at single-partner firms.

There is a significant difference in the proportion of lawyers from a 'privileged' background compared to the UK population, with the largest firms having the greatest proportion of those who went to independent/fee-paying schools, at 29% compared to 7.5% nationally and the greatest proportion of lawyers from a professional socio-economic background, at 68% compared to 37% nationally.

There continues to be potential under-reporting of disability within the sector, although there has been an increase from 4% in 2019, just 5% lawyers reported they had a disability, compared to 14% of the wider UK working population.

Looking at 'prefer not to say' trends, there was an encouraging increase in data declaration levels in all areas, with the exception of disability where 'prefer not to say' responses increased slightly.

Anna Bradley, Chair of the SRA, said: 'A diverse and inclusive legal profession which reflects the wider community is not only good for the public, but good for legal businesses themselves. These latest results show that while we continue to see change for the better across many

areas, work is needed to achieve real diversity and inclusion across the sector as a whole.

‘Diversity for Black, Asian and minority ethnic solicitors and women at senior levels is a particular challenge at large firms. We know that many firms have excellent initiatives in place to address progression and retention, but there is clearly more to be done. We will be using this data to inform our decisions about the contribution we can make to bringing about the difference we all want to see. We encourage everyone else to do the same.’

We have used the raw data for our analysis this year, which includes the ‘prefer not to say’ responses. This aligns with wider best practice for reporting diversity data and is a different approach to that used in previous years.

A comparison tool is available which allows firms to benchmark how they compare to similar firms in the profession.

The full details are on our [diversity pages](https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/key-findings/diverse-legal-profession/) [https://www.sra.org.uk/sra/equality-diversity/key-findings/diverse-legal-profession/].