

How diverse are law firms?

2015

About the data 2015

Our diversity data collection applies to all law firms in England and Wales, which employ around 73% of all solicitors who are practising. Most of the others work in-house within the public or private sectors.

Firms asked their staff to respond to a standard set of diversity questions and reported their data to the SRA in Autumn 2015. By 31 October 2015, 88% of law firms had reported their data - with an average response rate per firm of 75%.

The data used in the law firm diversity tool has been adjusted using recognised statistical modelling techniques to give us a more accurate picture by predicting the diversity characteristics where there were gaps.

You can view the raw data (PDF 1 page, 190K)

[<https://www.sra.org.uk/globalassets/documents/solicitors/diversity-toolkit/diversity-results-table-2015.pdf?version=4985d0>] , which includes the 'prefer not to say' and the invalid responses. For some questions we had a very good response, for example, 96% of all lawyers provided their data for age, and 97% for gender.

For disability and ethnicity it was 91% and the lowest response rate from all lawyers was about caring responsibilities (83%), religion (83%), school and university education (both 85%) and sexual orientation (86%).

Where the response rates are lower, the adjusted data may be less reliable, and a warning will be displayed on screen.

We have grouped the 12 role categories into 5 groups within the tool:

- **All**
- **Partners** – solicitor partners, sole practitioners, and members or directors.
- **Solicitors/other lawyers** – solicitors and other lawyers such as barristers, or chartered legal executives.
- **Other staff** – other fee earners, support roles, managers, and other corporate service roles such as IT or HR.
- **All lawyers** – this combines solicitors/other lawyers and partners.

Key findings

Overall there has been little change since our last data collection in January 2014. Below are our key findings using the adjusted data.

Gender

Overall, women make up 47% of all lawyers in law firms which is the same as the census data for economically active people. For the other staff working in law firms, women are in the majority at 76%.

Differences become more apparent when we look at seniority, as women make up just 33% of partners which has increased from 31% since the last survey. The difference is greater still in the larger firms (50 plus partners), which have 27% female partners compared with 35% for smaller firms (2 to 5 partners).

We can also see some differences by type of work. For example, when we look at all lawyers, women are under represented in criminal work, 39% compared to 47% in all other firms. Women are also under represented in corporate work, 44% compared to 47%. Because the larger firms are more likely to do corporate work¹ [note1], it is difficult to know whether the disparity is because fewer women are doing that type of work, or because there are fewer women in the larger firms.

In firms that do private client² [note2] work, women are over represented, 54% compared to 47% of all firms.

Ethnicity

Overall, BAME individuals make up 18% of all lawyers, which is higher than the census data for economically active people (13%). Asian people are over represented among all lawyers (12% compared to 7%) and Black people are under represented (2% compared to 3%).

The breakdown of other staff working in law firms is more closely aligned to the wider population, with 14% BAME overall (of which 8% are Asian and 3% Black).

Unlike what we saw for women, there is very little difference by seniority when we look at all firms - 18% BAME solicitors/other lawyers and 17% BAME partners.

Differences become apparent when we look at the breakdown of partners in firms by size. The larger firms (50 plus partners) have the lowest proportion of BAME partners, in particular Asian partners make up just 4% compared with 16% in the smaller firms (2 to 5 partners).

Disability

Disabled people are under represented in law firms compared to the wider population. Only 3% of all lawyers and 4% of other staff have a disability. Government Labour Force Survey Analysis shows that 10% of working age adults in employment are disabled.

There is little difference overall between the proportion of disabled people in the solicitor/other lawyers group and in the partner group. However, within both there is a lower than average proportion of disabled people in larger firms (50 plus partners).

There are some differences by work type, with lower proportions of disabled people in firms doing corporate work (2%) and property work (2%).

Sexual orientation

Across all firms, 97% of all lawyers and other staff are heterosexual and although census figures suggest 1.5% of the general population is lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB), Stonewall estimates this figure is more likely to be 5-7%.

There is little difference overall, between the LGB population for solicitors/other lawyers and for partners. There were small differences by firm size, with slightly more gay men in larger firms compared to smaller ones.

Religion and belief

Overall, Christians formed the largest proportion of all lawyers at 54%. Those who had no religion or belief (including atheists) formed the second largest group at 28%. The next largest religious groups were Muslims (8%) and Jewish people (3%).

Social mobility

We have used attendance at a fee paying school and whether someone was the first in their generation to attend university, as a proxy for social mobility in this survey.

Attendance at fee paying schools

There is a significant gap between lawyers and the general population, as 22% of all lawyers attended fee paying schools, compared with 7% in the general population (according to research by the Independent Schools Council in 2015) . The other staff group mirrors the general population.

There are also notable differences between partners (26%) and the solicitors/other lawyers (19%) who went to fee paying schools. The gap is higher still for partners in the larger firms - 37% (50 plus partners) compared with 23% (2 to 5 partners).



Compared to 2014, there is a very slight decrease in the proportion of lawyers attending fee paying school - 4% fewer solicitor/other lawyers and 3% for partners.

The difference increases when we look at work type, with a higher proportion of all lawyers in corporate firms (33%) who attended these schools and a lower proportion in criminal firms (16%).

First generation in the family to attend university

In contrast, a higher proportion of partners were the first generation in their family to attend university (60%), compared to 49% of solicitors/other lawyers.

Partners in smaller firms are more likely to have been the first generation (60%) than those in larger firms (53%).

Age

The majority of all lawyers are between 25 and 34 (32%) - partners tend to be over 45 and solicitors/other lawyers under this age. This reflects the average career pattern of solicitors and when they might expect to become partners in a firm.

There is an over representation of older solicitors who are sole practitioners. 37% of sole practitioners (partners in 0-1 partner firms) are 55 or over compared to 17% of partners in the largest firms (50 plus partners).

Caring responsibilities

A third of all lawyers have primary caring responsibilities for children. It is slightly higher for partners (33%) than solicitors/other lawyers (32%). These differences are exaggerated when we look at work type and size:

- For corporate law firms, 39% of partners and 22% of solicitors have caring responsibilities
- In firms with 5+ branches, it is 40% for partners and 31% for solicitors;
- In firms with 50+ partners, it is 38% for partners and 27% for solicitors.

Notes

1. Corporate work includes financial advice, debt collection bankruptcy and insolvency.

2. Private client includes work for private individuals covering children, consumer, matrimonial, immigration, mental health, social welfare, wills and probate.