



CORPORATE STATEMENT

THE LAW SOCIETY OF
NORTHERN IRELAND



THE **LAW SOCIETY**
OF NORTHERN IRELAND



CORPORATE STATEMENT

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1. WHO WE ARE

1. The Law Society of Northern Ireland (the Law Society) is the independent and self-funding body which governs solicitors in Northern Ireland. Our independence and self-funding ensures we remain free from influence from government and other sectional interests.
2. Established by Royal Charter in 1922, the Law Society sets and regulates professional and ethical standards for solicitors for the protection of the public.
3. Professional and ethical standards are twofold: those which relate to the quality of the legal service clients are entitled to expect from their solicitor, and those which relate to the behaviour of their solicitor. They include the propriety of solicitors' conduct in general and the handling of client funds in particular.
4. The profession comprises some 2,700 practising solicitors in Northern Ireland. There is a wide network of over 530 solicitors' firms in private practice at over 70 locations throughout the jurisdiction, ranging from sole practitioners to 10 or more partners or directors in larger firms. Solicitors also work in the public sector, in-house organisations and other legal employment.
5. The Law Society is an authoritative voice on justice issues and issues surrounding the administration of law and protection of the citizen's fundamental rights and freedoms. We promote the benefit of legal expertise of solicitors for the local community and business, with the added value solicitors bring in terms of commercial acumen, diversity and experience in finding solutions.





2. OUR LEGAL FRAMEWORK

1. The Law Society's Royal Charter, the Solicitors' (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, Bye Laws and Regulations set out the governance and legal framework of the Law Society.
2. The Law Society is governed by a Council of thirty elected members. The Council is headed by the President. The elected President, Senior and Junior Vice Presidents and Chief Executive comprise the Presidential Team. The President, Senior and Junior Vice Presidents hold office for a three year period. Typically, the Senior Vice President is the immediate outgoing President, and Junior Vice President the incoming President during the period. Each will have held senior positions on the Council of the Law Society before taking office.
3. The Chief Executive is the Registrar of Solicitors who has statutory power to grant Practising Certificates to those admitted to the Roll of Solicitors, upon annual application. There is statutory power to suspend a solicitor's Practising Certificate.
4. The Chief Executive is the Secretary to the Council and principal Accounting Officer.
5. The Council has power, subject to the concurrence of the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, to make Regulations under the Solicitors' (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, which specify requirements and standards in areas of practice.
6. The statutory and other business of the Law Society is discharged through dedicated Committees which report to the Council.





3. OUR VALUES

Our Values underpin who we are, our Mission Statement, our strategic objectives and how we exercise our powers and functions.

Our Values are:

(i) Independence

We value our independence.

(ii) Transparency

We value being transparent, accessible and responsive.

(iii) Relevance

We value being well-informed, authoritative and engaged.

(iv) Professionalism

We value being professional, responsible and proportionate.





4. OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Our Mission Statement is:

To develop, maintain, represent and ensure a valued solicitors' profession that

- provides high quality legal services
- enhances public confidence in solicitors as the independent, trusted, legal, go-to advisers of choice, and
- through its links in a local forum provides citizens with access to justice and seeks to uphold the rule of law

in the political, business and local community, with the public interest at its heart.





5. OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

In our pursuit and delivery of our strategic objectives, we shall

1. use our resources economically, efficiently and effectively as a professional organisation, in the performance of our statutory obligations, while leading, developing and guiding solicitors;
2. protect the public by ensuring solicitors maintain high standards of professional conduct and deliver high quality professional services;
3. support solicitors by equipping them to be the advisers of choice who provide high quality professional services for the public and business
 - by ensuring appropriate and relevant training for registered students
 - by providing on-going education of solicitors through Continuing Professional Development programmes, and
 - by offering access to high quality legal research and information services.
4. use our expert skills and knowledge base to promote the interests of solicitors and their clients, to protect and broaden access to justice;
5. use our unique position as the leader of the solicitors' branch of the legal profession in Northern Ireland to continue to speak authoritatively on issues of justice, promoting the rule of law and the need for independence of the legal profession in a democracy, championing the interests of the vulnerable in our community.





6. WHAT WE DO

1. As the independent body for solicitors in Northern Ireland, the Law Society promotes and regulates standards of probity and excellence throughout the profession, from admission to retirement.
2. We engage with local and central Government, political parties, financial institutions, the public, media and other interest groups on all matters directly affecting the profession and their clients, to enshrine and embed the individual's right to access to justice, and promote the interests of the public and our profession.
3. We pursue a proactive and responsive high level engagement strategy with all our interested parties, both within and outside the Law Society, making representations at local, national and international levels.
4. We ensure that the practical experience and legal knowledge of solicitors working with clients in the community is collated and referred to decision makers, to inform debate and influence the decision making process.
5. Our regulation of solicitors' compliance with and adherence to the core values of our profession - independence, confidentiality and the avoidance of conflicts of interests - strengthens the administration of justice.
6. We exercise additional delegated and voluntary co-regulatory and supervisory responsibilities with others. In the exercise of these responsibilities we have statutory reporting obligations.

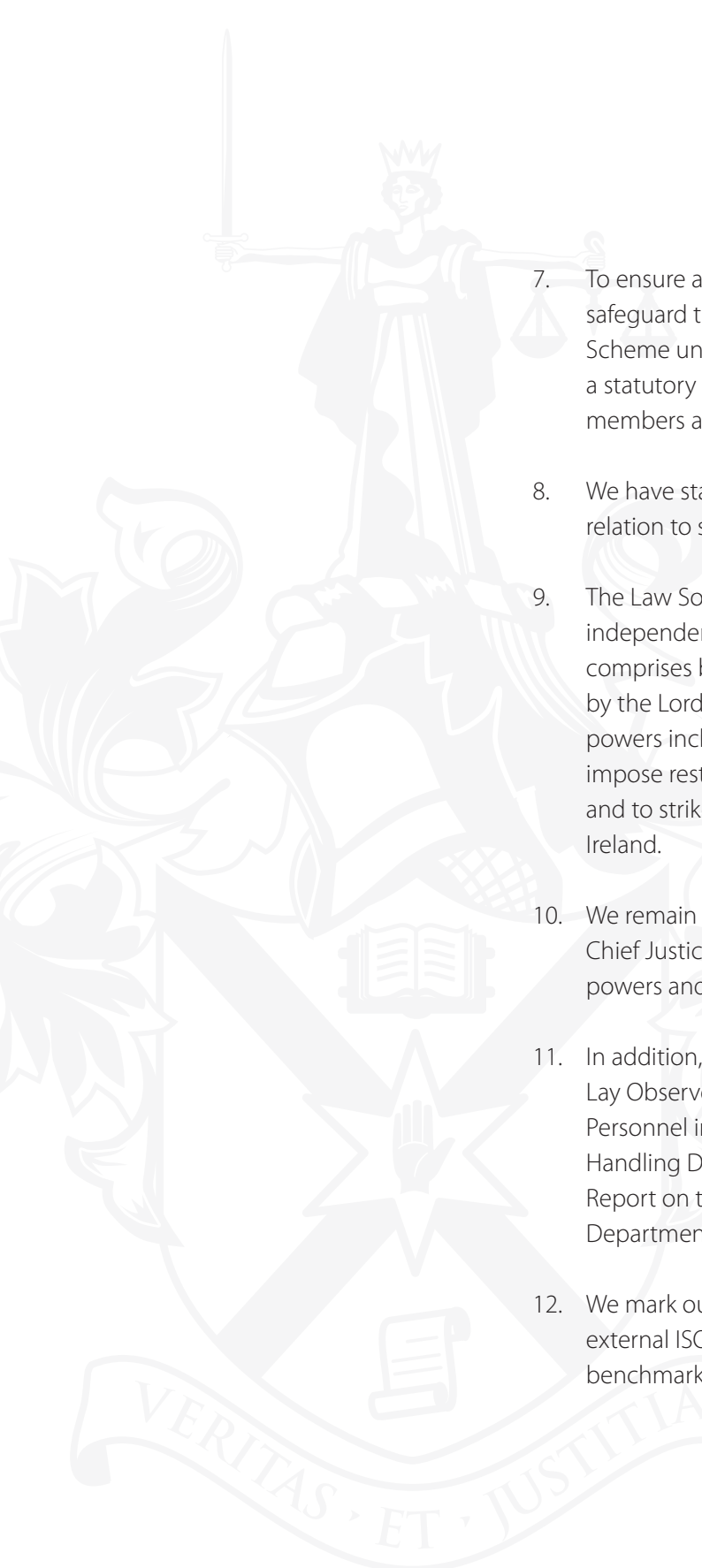




7. HOW WE EXERCISE OUR POWERS AND FUNCTIONS

1. Under the Solicitors (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, the Law Society is the regulatory authority which governs the education, admission, and professional conduct of our members to ensure and monitor the ethical standards, professional competence and quality of the legal services our members deliver to the public.
2. Entrance to our profession is governed by law. Our registered students must successfully complete vocational training, an amalgam of structured academic learning and evidenced, practical training in solicitors' offices before applying to the Registrar for admission to the Roll of Solicitors in Northern Ireland.
3. Solicitors or legally qualified professionals from other jurisdictions who demonstrate that they meet our regulatory requirements may be admitted to the Roll of Solicitors, upon application.
4. The Registrar has statutory responsibility for the grant of Practising Certificates to solicitors in Northern Ireland.
5. In our commitment to and promulgation of standards of excellence we require our members to undertake annual Continuing Professional Development, and provide evidence of how they meet our regulatory requirements. In particular, members are required to complete annual Client Care and Practice Management Continuing Professional Development training, and for those of our members who practice conveyancing, they must attend recognised compulsory conveyancing training. Our Solicitor Insolvency Practitioners must demonstrate relevant Continuing Professional Development annually.
6. The Law Society regulates, supervises and monitors the activities of our members proactively and reactively. We do so in the interests of the public, in a manner which is impartial, effective and proportionate, consonant with high professional and ethical standards.



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7. To ensure and enhance public confidence in solicitors and safeguard the public, we operate a Master Policy of Insurance Scheme under which our members must practise, and maintain a statutory Compensation Fund to which all our practising members are required to contribute.
 8. We have statutory power to receive and adjudicate matters in relation to solicitors' conduct and solicitor client complaints.
 9. The Law Society has statutory powers to refer solicitors to the independent statutory Solicitors' Disciplinary Tribunal which comprises both lay members and practising solicitors appointed by the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland. The Tribunal's powers include power to admonish solicitors, impose fines, impose restriction on practice, order suspension from practice and to strike solicitors from the Roll of Solicitors in Northern Ireland.
 10. We remain subject to the overarching supervision of the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland in the exercise of our statutory powers and functions.
 11. In addition, the Society is subject to oversight by the independent Lay Observer, appointed by the Department of Finance and Personnel in respect of the operation of the Client Complaints Handling Department. The Lay Observer publishes an Annual Report on the operation of the Client Complaints Handling Department.
 12. We mark our own commitment to excellence through our external ISO quality accreditation, where we conduct our business benchmarked against standards of professional distinction.





8. RESOURCES

1. The Law Society is funded solely by its members. It does not receive any public funding.
2. Led by the Chief Executive, the Law Society is organised in departments with each department headed by senior professionals. With a complement of suitably qualified and experienced personnel, we deliver services to meet the statutory and other strategic and business obligations and requirements of the Law Society.
3. The Law Society is based in Law Society House, Belfast situated in the heart of the city's Legal Quarter. It houses a well-resourced practitioner focussed Library Information Services and Business Centre, available to all members, with an Educational and Continuing Professional Development suite and a Research Unit, all of which support and promote the Society's commitment to professional excellence. It also provides a range of business services and facilities for members, including research facilities, consulting rooms, teleconferencing facilities, video link, remote access to the office and access to Information and Communication Technology generally.





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