



LAW SOCIETY OF IRELAND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept whereby organisations integrate social and environmental concerns into their mainstream business operations and their interaction with stakeholders on a voluntary basis.

The Law Society of Ireland (the Society) has always had a strong sense of CSR. This CSR Statement represents our vision for responsible and sustainable business practice through the adoption and implementation of best practice in CSR.

The Society strives, in partnership with our members, students and employees, to work in a responsible and ethical way, to lead by example, to be a champion of CSR among the profession and to continuously improve our activities and processes. The Society prides itself on the many positive projects with which it has been involved.

This Statement has been drafted in line with the core dimensions in Ireland's National Plan on Corporate Social Responsibility 2017-2020: (1) Workplace (2) Marketplace (3) Environment, and (4) Community.



WORKPLACE | MARKETPLACE | ENVIRONMENT | COMMUNITY



1. WORKPLACE

The Society's employees drive its continued success. They support the Society's vision of being 'The trusted voice of a respected solicitors' profession'.

The Society strives to be a good employer, offering transparent terms and conditions and fair compensation and benefits. Some examples of our workplace initiatives include:

- In line with best practice, the Society has **proactive and strategic HR policies**. These go beyond compliance and incorporate a focus on employee consultation and communication, wellbeing, work-life balance, training, education and career development opportunities.
- **Equal opportunities** is a concept to which the Society is committed, and all employment decisions are based on merit, qualifications and abilities.
- The Society's **Wellbeing Programme** is called 'Vitality' and is run by the internal Vitality Committee. It has five core pillars which cover physical wellbeing, career, mental health, finance, and community. A full programme of events, classes and initiatives centered on these pillars is available to staff throughout the year.
- The Society's **Employee Support Programme** 'It's Good to Talk' is available to employees and their families.
- The **Commuter Tax Saver Scheme** is available, to ease the financial burden of commuting on staff.
- A **Bike to Work Scheme** is available to staff, promoting greener work commutes, with convenient bike locking areas provided onsite.



2. MARKETPLACE

The Society's mission statement, values and strategic plan signal the manner in which we conduct our business and also reflect our ethical intentions. We champion and support the values and concepts of justice, fairness, equity, legitimacy and the rule of law including:

- The Society's **Diversity and Inclusion Statement** shows our commitment to respecting diversity and inclusion for the benefit of our employees, members, solicitors, trainee solicitors and the public. We actively support gender equality and are proud that the solicitors' profession in Ireland was the first in the world to achieve female majority. Likewise, we support equal rights regardless of sexual orientation and supported the passing of the Marriage Equality Referendum. In May 2020 the Society launched its **GEDI Charter**. Solicitors and firms who sign the Charter commit



to upholding and promoting GEDI principles within the profession.

- To celebrate and encourage diversity at the Law School, the students' spearheaded a new Diversity Project. This included highlighting students additional language skills, providing a facility for phonetic name spellings to be captured to assist staff in pronunciation of unfamiliar names, and mentoring of incoming students.
- The Society supports the **Irish Women Lawyers Association (IWLA)** which focuses on advocating for and providing professional networking for all women lawyers in Ireland.
- The **Women in Leadership Mentoring Programme** is designed to support women who wish to advance their career to the next level. The mentor panel is made up of senior solicitors, male and female, from the public and private sectors.
- Social diversity within the legal profession is supported through the **Society's Access Programme** and **Bursary Scheme**. Operating successfully since 2001, the Access scholarship programme aims to assist students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to gain access to professional legal education. The scheme has assisted 120 participants in qualifying as solicitors and current and former participants span 22 nationalities. The Society also operates a Bursary Scheme in respect of each course. Any student that considers his or her own resources are inadequate to fund their study can apply for a bursary.
- The Society through its committees and task forces including **Human Rights and Equality**, Mental Health and Capacity, **Guidance and Ethics**, **Criminal, Litigation**, and **Family and Child Law**, advocates for access to justice and law reform to improve legislation and its effects on society, in particular on the vulnerable, in order to ensure recognition and vindication of their rights and for the common good.
- The Society strives to **participate fully in public life** so that issues of fairness and justice are to the fore in public discourse. This work is conducted largely through the Policy and Public Affairs function and through regular engagement with elected representatives and policy makers.



3. ENVIRONMENT

The Society is committed to energy efficiency, minimising waste, reducing water consumption, encouraging the use of greener modes of transport, creating a biodiverse campus and generally encouraging a culture of sustainability. To this end, two Task Forces have been created (1) an inter-departmental Task Force for staff, 'An Cumann Glas', and (2) the Environmental and Sustainability in Practice Task Force (EAST) for members, to build on the achievements the Society has made in environmental sustainability. The Society continues to develop



a number of environmental initiatives, including:

- **Reduce, Reuse and Recycle** has been embraced by the Society through recycling by its catering facility, its strategy to reduce paper, its opt-in facility for publications, the donation of used IT equipment, the use of carbon balanced paper, energy efficient heating and lighting systems, and a variety of other initiatives.
- **Biodiversity** is an integral part of the Society's environmental plans and we are collaborating with the All Ireland Pollinator Plan and the Local Authority Waters Programme. A greenhouse for onsite catering has been installed and two apiaries for a local beekeeper.
- To promote **greener work commutes**, a Bike to Work Scheme has been made available to staff, and three electric car charging points have been installed in the car park.
- The Society's **Environmental and Sustainability in Practice Task Force (EAST)** was established in 2020. The work of the Task Force is divided into a number of pillars which includes an examination of the Law Society's environmental footprint, environmental law in practice, and the development of tools to support members in their practice.



4. COMMUNITY

The Society is very aware that it is in a strong position to give something back to the local and wider community. We actively support many community engagement initiatives including those outlined below:

FUNDRAISING, CHARITABLE GIVING, VOLUNTEERING, ACCESS TO JUSTICE

- The Society supports three specific charitable initiatives through direct financial supports and resources:
 1. **The Solicitors Benevolent Association** is a voluntary charitable body which provides financial assistance to members or former members of the solicitors' profession, their spouses, families and immediate dependents. It is funded by donations collected by the Society each year through practising certificates.
 2. **Irish Rule of Law International (IRLI)** is a joint initiative of the Society and the Bar Council of Ireland, dedicated to promoting the rule of law in developing countries. IRLI seeks to harness the skills of Irish lawyers in using the law as a means of tackling global injustice and empowering all people to live in a society free from inequality, corruption and conflict. IRLI has initiated and supported initiatives in South Africa, Kosovo, Malawi, Myanmar, Vietnam, Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
 3. **The Calcutta Run - the Legal Fundraiser** is organised annually by the Society.



Almost €4.3 million has been raised to 2019 for the Peter McVerry Trust and the Hope Foundation, to support homeless youths in Dublin and Calcutta. In 2020, a virtual Calcutta Run was held, raising €230,000. Participants had a week long window to run, cycle, walk or hike any distance and post it to the website to reach a collective 10,000kms from Dublin to Kolkata.

- Contributions are also collected from practising solicitors each year for donation to the **Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)** and **Community Law Centres**.
- The Society's employees, Council and trainee solicitors support or volunteer with a number of charities, including **Habitat for Humanity**, **Run in the Dark**, **Barnardos**, the **Irish Hospice Foundation**, **Shine a Light Night** and others.
- The Society has also contributed financial support to the **European Lawyers in Lesvos project (ELIL)**. ELIL works with a team of full-time Greek asylum lawyers and volunteer European lawyers on the Greek islands of Lesvos and Samos to defend the fundamental rights of asylum seekers.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Trainee solicitors volunteer as tutors and offer assistance in a number of schools and youth clubs in the local community through the **'Just Ask' Homework and After School Club**.
- The **Everyone Can Code** project is a voluntary initiative between the Society and a local primary school. Instead of teaching law, members of the Society's IT and Education staff teach computer code. This joint project looks at coding using the Apple 'Everyone Can Code' curriculum, and runs over the course of the school year in Blackhall Place.
- The Society commenced a partnership with the **Irish Red Cross** in 2018 to train trainee solicitors as volunteer therapeutic care practitioners to provide healing hand massage therapy at community locations close to Blackhall Place.
- **Blackhall Place Sports Facilities** are made available to local schools, for instance for sports days. The sports facilities on site include a basketball court, park exercise equipment and a five-a-side football pitch.
- **Seachtain na Gaeilge** is actively supported in the Society. Seachtain na Gaeilge is an international Irish language festival and one of the biggest celebrations of our native language and culture that takes place each year in Ireland and in many other countries.
- During **Culture Night** and **National Heritage Week** free guided tours of Blackhall Place (Blue Coat School) are conducted for the public.
- **Open House** is an event run every year by the Irish Architecture Foundation whereby private historical buildings are open to members of the public. Each year Blackhall Place is included in their portfolio.



PROVISION AND PROMOTION OF LEGAL INFORMATION

The Society is committed to delivering a transformative learning experience for members of the public in order to teach people about the legal system and how law impacts on society.

Our **Public Legal Education** comprises the following outreach initiatives:

- **Legal Ambitions Summer School** is a new online outreach programme first offered by the Society in 2020 to 1,500 transition and fifth year students, from all over Ireland. This free programme is designed to encourage students to consider a career in law and offers an insight into the role of a solicitor in practice.
- **Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC)** offered by the Society's Diploma Centre annually, are free online courses, open to all and specifically designed to enable participation by large numbers. Topics have included data protection, privacy, aviation leasing and finance, employment law and sports law. Since 2014, the Society's MOOCs have attracted over 10,000 participants from over 70 countries.
- **Public Legal Education Certificate** is a free education programme run over six months which develops the skills of solicitors to run effective public legal education programmes in their community.
- **Solicitors of the Future** is an innovative transition year (TY) work experience programme offered at the Society which provides TY students with an introduction to the solicitors' profession. Open to schools around the country, Solicitors of the Future encourages TY students to consider a career in law, and offers an insight into the role of a solicitor in practice.
- **Street Law Schools** places trainee solicitors, studying at the Society, in local secondary schools, to teach about law. Each year, over forty selected volunteer trainees teach a two month 'Street Law' course to transition year students in thirteen DEIS secondary schools (DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) in the local community. Since 2013, trainee solicitors have brought the law to life for over 3,000 transition year students.
- **Street Law Prison** has expanded over the past four years to include Wheatfield Prison in partnership with the charity Solas and their Compass programme for prisoners. The programme is also offered in Mercy Law Resource Centre, Mountjoy Prison and the Dochas Centre. Trainee solicitors work with prisoners and former prisoners to raise their awareness and understanding of the law in areas such as human rights, privacy, employment law, democracy, society and discrimination.
- The Society has produced a series of **multilingual client care leaflets** on common legal issues. Aimed at the public, the leaflets have been awarded the 'Plain English' stamp by the National Adult Literacy Association. They have also been translated into five different languages, in recognition of the diversity of nationality within Ireland.



- **The Justice Media Awards** are organised by the Society every year and aim to reward outstanding journalism for contributions to the public's understanding of the law, the legal system or any specific legal issues.
- The Society is a sponsor of the **British and Irish Legal Information Institute (BAILII) initiative** for the provision of free access to British and Irish primary legal materials. BAILII provides reliable information resources for private individuals, organisations serving civil society, those in legal education and training, and those involved in and serving the legal system.

MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

The Society has an opportunity to lead by example in adhering to CSR best practices and principles. We are committed to continuously improving and to championing the wide range of CSR contributions positively made by the profession. We will keep our CSR Statement under review as part of our Annual Operational Plan. We will consider what guidance and supports we can provide to members to help improve and develop their own CSR position.

