

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 (4) Community (5) Management and communication.

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.
- **Training grants** are available to staff who wish to further their education.
- **Classes** such as meditation and mindfulness are available to staff, together with other self-improvement classes in personal finance and stress management. A full programme of exercise classes is offered including yoga, pilates, spinning, bootcamp, and tai chi. Language classes in Spanish and French are also available
- The Society supports **staff social events**, the highlights of which include the staff Summer BBQ, Children's Christmas party and staff Christmas party. It also supports the staff Book Club.
- The **Commuter Tax Saver Scheme** is available, to ease the financial burden of commuting on staff.

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. The Society strives to create a culture of inclusion, mutual respect and equal opportunities. 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.

- 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 Society collaborates with them in the context of the Law and Women Mentoring Programme (set out below) and provides venues for seminars and their Annual GALA Dinner.
- The [Law & Women Mentoring Programme](#) is an expression of the Society's commitment to gender equality, diversity and inclusion. The 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 from the public and private sector. Solicitors are invited to apply for a place on the Programme in January each year. They are provided with training in mentoring techniques. This is followed by a careful matching process. Mentoring partners usually meet once a month over the course of a year during which there are opportunities for them to attend networking events held in association with the Bar of Ireland.
- 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. It is contributing to the creation of a broader spectrum of solicitors, which is vital in promoting a legal profession that reflects the diversity of the society it serves. The scheme has assisted 96 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. Applications are decided on the basis of comparative hardship and the size of the award may vary depending on the applicant's circumstances.
- Our Guidance and Ethics Committee published the third edition of [A Guide to Good Professional Conduct for Solicitors](#) in October 2013.
- Our [Human Rights and Equality Committee](#) was established in November 2004 with the main purpose of raising awareness within the Society, the profession and the public of human rights issues. Its work includes developing resources for use by the profession in relation to the protection and promotion of human rights. The Committee provides expert advice and assistance to the Society on issues relating to human rights and equality, both domestic and foreign, and co-operates with other Society committees in relation to human rights and equality issues. It prepares statements, submissions and commentary as required on current events, publications and initiatives, including legislation and the reports of international bodies, such as UN committees. It often works with other Society committees and counterpart organisations in the promotion and advancement of human rights and equality, both in Ireland and abroad.
- Our **Mental Health and Capacity Task Force** works to promote and protect the rights, freedoms and dignity of all adults whose decision making capacity may be in

question, may about to be in question or who lack capacity, in particular contributing to the legislative reform process in this area.

- The Society advocates **access to justice** and the **protection of legal aid**, particularly through the work of our [Family and Child Law](#), [Litigation](#) and [Criminal Law Committees](#).
- The Society strives to participate fully in public life so that **issues of fairness and justice** are to the fore in public discourse.

3. Environment

The Society is committed to energy efficiency, minimising waste, reducing water consumption, encouraging the use of greener modes of transport and generally encouraging a culture of sustainability and an awareness of our impact on the environment. Some of our initiatives include:

- **Reduce, Reuse and Recycle** has been embraced by the Society. We take every opportunity to recycle any waste that we generate. The Society's caterers use 100% recyclable cups in the café, with an incentive of double loyalty stamps for any customer who purchases beverages using a keep cup.
- **Collection points for print cartridges** are available in Blackhall Place. These are donated to raise funds for Crumlin Children's Hospital.
- When **personal computers, projectors, laptops or tablets** reach the end of their business lifecycle in the Society, they are formatted and donated either to local DEIS schools (DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) or, if not required by them, to the Irish Rule of Law International (IRLI) project in Malawi. Any electronic equipment that cannot be donated is environmentally recycled with a specialist IT asset disposal company.
- The Society is pursuing a strategy to **reduce paper** and has already implemented 'paperless meetings' with its regulatory committees, electronic payslips, EFT payments to suppliers, electronic invoice processing etc.
- **A Bike to Work Scheme** has been made available to staff, promoting greener work commutes, with convenient bike locking areas provided onsite.
- **Blackhall Place** has been preserved to maintain its integrity, in recognition of its architectural and historical importance and its status as a protected structure.

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 Calcutta Run - the Legal Fundraiser](#) is organised annually by the Society. Almost €4 million has been raised to 2018 for the Peter McVerry trust and the Hope Foundation, to support homeless youths in Dublin and Calcutta.
- [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. Trainee solicitors volunteer annually with the IRLI office, both in Ireland and overseas, to assist with their work.

- [Habitat for Humanity](#) is supported by trainee solicitors who volunteer abroad, such as Habitat for Humanity's Orphans and Vulnerable Children Programme, in Zambia and Malawi. Trainee solicitors fundraise approximately €30,000 annually towards building works for Habitat for Humanity. They also volunteer their legal knowledge in providing free legal advice workshops regarding security of tenure, legal ownership and succession rights in the areas where they volunteer.
- [Barnardos](#) is a children's charity who work with vulnerable children and their families in Ireland and campaign for the rights of all children. The Society's employees and Council members support the Barnardos Christmas Toy Appeal by purchasing Christmas presents, which are then distributed by Barnardos to disadvantaged children. The Society also supports Barnardos through its annual Christmas party for children of Society staff.
- The [Solicitors Benevolent Association](#) is a voluntary charitable body supported by the Society to assist solicitors and their immediate dependents that are in need. It is funded by donations collected by the Society each year through practising certificates.
- [LawCare](#) is a charitable body that promotes, raises awareness of and supports wellbeing within the legal community. It offers a free, independent and confidential service for solicitors, trainee solicitors, their immediate families and their staff. LawCare's freephone helpline 1800 991 801 is available 365 days a year. LawCare's website www.lawcare.ie provides practical information and advice on maintaining wellbeing and links to other sources of help. The Society has funded the provision of LawCare in Ireland since 2008.
- The Law Society, Blackhall Place, was used as a venue for Focus Ireland's [Shine a Light Night](#) for business leaders, on 12 October 2018. This is an annual event where up to 100 Chief Executive Officers of some of the best known organisations and companies in Ireland experience the hardship of sleeping out overnight, while raising considerable money for Focus Ireland's homeless project. Business leaders from all around the country slept on the front lawn of Blackhall Place in solidarity with those we see every day sleeping on our streets. Our then President, Michael Quinlan, participated in the event and raised funds for this worthy cause.
- **A number of charities benefit** each year from funds raised by Society staff and trainee solicitors at events held in the Society, such as coffee mornings and carol services.

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 club is delighted with how positively their students seem to respond to the support. It is hoped that the experience might also encourage them to consider undertaking third level studies.

- The Society has 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.
- 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 will teach computer code. This joint project will look at coding using the Apple 'Everyone Can Code' curriculum, and will run over the course of the school year in Blackhall Place. Each child will have access to an iPad during this class time.
- **Blackhall Place Sports Facilities** are made available to local schools for sports days etc.
- [Seachtain na Gaeilge](#) is actively supported in the Society.
- 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

- [Free Legal Advice Centres \(FLAC\)](#), an independent organisation dedicated to the realisation of equal access to justice for all, benefits from many members of the Society and trainee solicitors who volunteer their time with the organisation. Contributions are collected from practising solicitors by the Society each year for donation to FLAC and **Community Law Centres**.
- The **public section of the Society's website** www.lawsociety.ie/public has helpful information including downloadable multilingual legal guides (updated June 2018), useful websites, reports and frequently asked questions. The Society also uses the News section of its website and its social media channels, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, to provide information and help with queries.
- 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.
- Representatives from the Society sit on 121 **external bodies**.
- The Society supports the [Association for Criminal Justice, Research and Development \(ACJRD\)](#) through the provision of venues for seminars. This charity, through its representative board from the Departments of Justice and Children and Youth Affairs, other agencies and academics, seeks to promote reform, development and effective operation of the criminal justice system. Their current Chairperson is a member of Society staff.
- [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, which is of particular value to Irish solicitors.

- The Society has contributed to the [Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe \(CCBE\) European Lawyers in Lesbos \(ELIL\) Project](#). ELIL sends European lawyers to hotspots in Greece, more particularly to Lesbos, in order to defend the fundamental rights of vulnerable migrant people in need of international protection. They observe, provide information and give legal advice to migrants. ELIL was inspired by belief in the fundamental importance of upholding the rule of law and ensuring meaningful access to legal assistance.

Public Legal Education

The Society actively supports [Public Legal Education](#) through a series of initiatives led by its Diploma Centre engaging with solicitors, trainees, and the public. Public Legal Education is a legal literacy initiative, to teach people about the legal system and how law impacts on society, so they can better exercise their legal rights and responsibilities. Our Public Legal Education programme was shortlisted for the Chambers Ireland CSR awards 2017 and 2018 in the Excellence in Community Programme.

Our Public Legal Education programme comprises the following initiatives:

Street Law Schools is an initiative which 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 at partnering schools. We currently work with thirteen DEIS secondary schools (DEIS: Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) in the local community. The programme culminates in a mock trial hearing, sponsored by the Society in the Criminal Courts of Justice. In 2018 our Street Law Programme was awarded silver at the European Association Awards, in the category for Best Training Initiative.

Street Law Prison working with the various schools in Mountjoy, Dochas, Wheatfield and Arbourhill to facilitate a Prison Law 'Know your rights' Programme. Our Wheatfield programme is in partnership with the charity Solas. We also work with the Pathways Centre, whose goal is to facilitate the reintegration of former prisoners. 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.

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 solicitor's 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. In addition, the programme shows how the law can be relevant to the daily lives of participants and promotes awareness of the legal processes, constitutional principles, and values, which underpin the rule of law in Ireland.

Certificate in Public Legal Education is a free education programme run over six months for our 'Solicitors in the Community' initiative. It aims to develop the skills of solicitors to run effective public legal education programmes in their community.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) offered by the Society's Diploma Centre annually, are free online courses, open to all and specifically designed for large numbers to participate in. Topics to-date have included data protection, privacy, aviation leasing and finance, employment law and sports law. MOOC embraces the Society's goal to widen access to legal education and the legal profession and is specifically designed to be of interest to both the Society's members and the public. To-date, the Diploma Centre's MOOCs have attracted over 10,000 participants from over 70 countries, since they first launched in 2014.

5. 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.

13/12/2018