

LawCare's response to LSB consultation on Encouraging a Diverse Legal Profession

About LawCare

[LawCare](#) is the mental health charity for the legal sector across the UK, Channel Islands and Isle of Man. We provide free, confidential emotional support to anyone working in law, conduct research and produce resources and training to help legal workplaces create healthier working cultures. Our frontline support, Life in Law research and insights from our engagement with stakeholders across the profession, gives us a unique and evidence-based perspective on the mental wellbeing of people in the sector, what undermines this and importantly what can improve it.

We strongly welcome this consultation and the compelling case for change the LSB has made. Although there has been significant activity and policy development to encourage diversity across the profession, progress remains slow. There is a need for strategic, collective action across the profession to dismantle the clearly evidenced barriers to diversity and foster workplace cultures where everyone feels they belong and can have sustainable careers.

A diverse and healthy legal profession are not separate ambitions, they are interconnected. Evidence from our Life in the Law research shows younger professionals, women, and disabled or neurodivergent professionals, report poorer wellbeing outcomes. Tackling the structural and cultural barriers that produce these outcomes is fundamental to both diversity and mental wellbeing.

LawCare's data

In October last year we published our Life in the Law 2025 report <https://lawcare.org.uk/life-in-the-law/> based on a survey of individuals and organisations across the sector conducted between January and March 2025.

The findings present a stark picture of a sector under strain:

- 60% of respondents (59.1%) reported poor mental wellbeing.
- 50% said they had experienced anxiety often, very often, or all of the time over the preceding 12 months.
- Over three-quarters (78.7%) regularly worked beyond their contracted hours
- A majority (56.2%) said they could see themselves leaving their current workplace within five years; a third (32.1%) could see themselves leaving the sector entirely.
- 32.3% said they were 'not likely' to recommend law as a career.
- Nearly one in five (19.5%) had experienced bullying, harassment, or discrimination at work in the preceding 12 months.
- Levels of psychological safety, how safe people feel to raise concerns, questions, and ideas, fell in the lower half of the scale.
- Only 31.3% of people who managed others said their targets or billable hours were adjusted to take account the time they need to spend managing others or undertaking appropriate training.

The recommendations of Life in the Law 2025 make it clear that addressing noninclusive working practices and the quality of people management, are essential for sustainable progress on mental wellbeing. Crucially, the same factors that undermine mental wellbeing such as poor management, excessive workloads and unhealthy cultures also act as barriers to diversity and inclusion. Addressing them is therefore not only a wellbeing imperative, but also a diversity one. The sector will struggle to attract and retain diverse people if these issues persist. By creating, healthier, more inclusive working environments, the profession will strengthen both the mental wellbeing of its people and long-term inclusion.

The business case for diversity

The business case for diversity is not new, it has been made and widely discussed across all sectors. The SRA published 'The business case for diversity' in 2018 and the LSB has set out in the case for change, annexed to this consultation, the evidence for a positive correlation between a diverse workforce and organisational performance. Although as the LSB acknowledges there has been some debate in the literature about the evidence that shows improved organisational performance, it is generally accepted that diverse teams have been found to be more effective at problem-solving, more innovative, improve recruitment, progression and retention and are better at representing the interests of their diverse clients.

Organisations that are inclusive and encourage diversity, may benefit in ways that are not typically measured such as employee satisfaction and wellbeing. The traditional focus of the 'business case' on financial gains such as increased shareholder value rather than on the value of human outcomes and corporate reputation, is narrow. A progressive perspective of the business case should include benefits arising from a diverse, inclusive, and healthy profession at multiple levels encompassing the individual, organisational, professional, and indeed the wider societal level which the profession serves.

Diversity data on its own, does not tell the whole story; what matters is not simply recruiting people with a broad range of characteristics, experiences, abilities, and knowledge, it is about making sure they feel valued, are encouraged to share their diverse perspectives and feel comfortable and safe to do so.

The delivery of legal services is rooted in knowledge and trust; the diversity of the people who deliver it shapes its quality and credibility.

Why this matters now

Our 2025 Impact Report, <https://lawcare.org.uk/our-impact/> demonstrates that despite increased awareness of mental health and wellbeing, and more attention being given to workplace initiatives to support this, legal professionals continue to struggle with stress, anxiety, and ongoing work pressures. We supported more people in 2025 than in any previous year, including during the pandemic.

The pressures on the profession are intensifying. The current geopolitical climate is contributing to increased regulatory complexity and economic pressures. The acceleration

of the adoption of AI is raising questions about the role of lawyers and the guard rails needed to ensure trust, quality and sustainability as this technology becomes more embedded in legal practice. At the same time, managers are under increasing pressure to meet the evolving expectations of colleagues, clients, and regulators, often with little support for themselves.

A profession that fails to draw on the full range of human talent, perspective and lived experience will be less equipped to navigate these challenges.

Responses to Specific Consultation Questions

Q1: The Proposed Outcomes Framework

LawCare supports the proposed outcomes framework and the development of a statutory statement of policy in place of the 2017 guidance. The four outcomes – strategic action, fair regulatory approaches, accessible pathways, and professional conduct and competence – reflect a comprehensive understanding of where the barriers to diversity lie.

We suggest an additional dimension is underweighted in the proposed framework, namely the circular and dynamic relationship between wellbeing and diversity and inclusion. Our Life in the Law 2025 research demonstrates that people with a disability, women, and those who identified as neurodivergent had lower wellbeing scores than others, with women having higher burnout scores than men and those with a disability having higher burnout scores than those without. Diversity without inclusion is not sustainable. Any outcome framework should make explicit that creating psychologically safe, supportive workplaces which we know to be integral to support wellbeing is also integral to diversity and inclusion.

Q2: Outcome 1 — Strategic, Evidence-Based and Collaborative Action

LawCare strongly supports the expectation that regulators should implement high-quality diversity data monitoring and publish strategic action plans with measurable goals. This should include aggregated and anonymous data about reasons why individuals have decided to leave the profession other than retirement, and data on the relevance of mental wellbeing in investigations and disciplinary proceedings. We agree that a cross professional approach to this with the use of the same measures by each regulator would be hugely beneficial for benchmarking and comparison purposes and will ensure a consistent approach is taken across the legal profession as a whole. Without data and impact measurement, there is no accountability. Achieving the desired outcomes for collecting this data will rely on transparency about how it is used and that regulators act visibly on the findings.

Further we would recommend that this collaborative action encourages regulators to work with representative bodies, who undertake significant work in advancing diversity and inclusion in the sector. This would unite both regulators and representative bodies in the shared goal of encouraging a strong, independent, and effective legal profession. Currently there are a range of diversity initiatives and research undertaken separately by regulators and representative bodies; impact would be greater if there was a recognition that more

could be achieved if tackling the barriers to diversity and inclusion was a united and joint endeavour between representative body and regulator.

We would encourage the LSB to ensure that Outcome 1 explicitly captures structural barriers such as discrimination/bullying/harassment, workload/allocation of work, effective management, and psychological safety. This would allow for more targeted evidence-based interventions and improve intersectional analysis. We would further add that there is consideration of capturing mental wellbeing data, but we recognise there is sensitivity around collection of this data by a regulator.

LawCare also supports the enhanced expectation around horizon scanning as the profession is evolving rapidly with the adoption of AI, changing business models and geopolitical pressures. It is important that regulators are forward-looking rather than reactive.

Finally, LawCare agrees with the proposal that regulators should be held to account for demonstrating how data collected and analysed subsequently feeds into strategic action plans. Data collection without such consideration of how findings can inform future policy and strategic direction would be a waste of effort and ultimately would not yield the positive changes that are needed.

Q3: Outcome 2 — Fair Regulatory Approaches

LawCare welcomes the focus on fair disciplinary processes and the safeguarding of wellbeing for those involved in enforcement. Our helpline regularly receives contacts from individuals going through regulatory disciplinary processes; these individuals are one of the most vulnerable groups that turn to us for support, and the impact on their mental health can be significant.

Systemic factors such as poor communication from the regulator during the investigation, the length of time it takes for the process to conclude, and potential barriers to legal representation also need addressing to ensure Outcome 2.

We would recommend that regulators direct their efforts to understanding why certain groups are overrepresented in the disciplinary and enforcement processes, what action can be taken to mitigate these risks, and how regulators can support these groups to meet the professional standards expected of them.

We are currently developing a specialist peer support programme for those involved in the disciplinary process, to provide emotional support, which we would like to see funded by professional stakeholders including the frontline regulators.

We would support the inclusion of specific guidance and training on trauma-informed approaches to regulatory investigations. LawCare through our insights and experience could provide this guidance and specialist training to panel members, staff and any other relevant party involved in disciplinary decision-making processes.

Q4: Outcome 3 — Accessible, Flexible and Inclusive Pathways

LawCare strongly supports this outcome.

We know from our research and insights that the culture of long hours, poor people management and bullying and harassment, makes it tough for those with caring responsibilities, health conditions, or disabilities to sustain a legal career over time. Findings from our Life in the Law 2025 study demonstrate the value of flexible and hybrid working in supporting mental wellbeing and diversity and inclusion. Flexible and hybrid working should be seen as structural enablers of diversity and inclusion, rather than benefits.

One of the five recommendations of our Life in the Law 2025 research is that legal education and training have a vital role to play in supporting mental health and wellbeing in the sector and should equip people joining the profession with the skills and knowledge they need for a sustainable legal career. The findings of our study suggest that there is work to be done to ensure that this form of preparation is integrated into learning and teaching environments. For bodies that regulate and supervise education and training there is a need to consider whether existing competency frameworks and educational requirements are achieving this and if not, how this can be addressed. Therefore, considering our initial statement that professional wellbeing and diversity and inclusion are intertwined, we would strongly support that regulators address how aspiring and early career professionals are supported to develop the competencies relevant to the interconnected nature of equality, diversity, inclusion, and wellbeing, as a core expectation.

We would particularly highlight the importance of Q4d: the question of barriers to re-entering the profession following a prolonged absence. People who take time away from practice, for mental health reasons, caring responsibilities, ill health, or other factors, often find it extremely difficult to return, even when they are fully capable of doing so. This is a significant source of talent loss and disproportionately affects women. LawCare calls for this to be given core status.

Q5: Outcome 4 — Professional Conduct and Competence

LawCare strongly supports the proposal to embed duties to prevent bullying, harassment, and discrimination and promote respect in codes of conduct, and to introduce additional conduct and competence standards for managers. We welcome the LSB's explicit reference to the value of compassionate management and leadership in this section of the consultation document. Specifically, we agree that much greater consideration needs to be given to ensuring that individuals who manage others are properly equipped and supported to do so. Our Life in the Law 2025 research demonstrates that only 54.6% of those with managerial responsibilities had received training to support them in managing people, and less than a third had their targets adjusted to reflect management responsibilities.

Poor management is not a neutral factor; it has differential impacts on those who are already less well-supported. Managers who lack training and recognition for their role may lack the confidence and experience to take action to address issues like overwork, bullying, and exclusion. We would support making management competency requirements, including on equality and inclusion, a core rather than an enhanced expectation.

LawCare's free and confidential support service, which meets best practice standards in the helpline sector, provides an existing platform for any individual working in the UK legal sector to raise a concern about issues at work from experiencing bullying and harassment to worries about a mistake. We understand the unique experience of working in the legal sector and have been responding to these concerns since 1997. We can provide immediate support, ongoing support through our peer support programme, provide guidance to the individual on how to move forward and signpost other support that may be available to them. We would like to see all regulators actively signposting to our service.

Q6: Implementation

We support the proposed timelines and welcome the recognition that regulatory change alone cannot deliver cultural change. LawCare is willing to contribute to the LSB's and the sector's efforts to support compliance through guidance and training, drawing on our research and insights from supporting people in the sector for nearly 30 years.

We would particularly ask that the LSB consider how regulators can support smaller firms, chambers, and in-house teams, who may have fewer resources to dedicate to improving diversity, inclusion, and wellbeing in their organisations, to meet the expectations, set out in this policy. LawCare's resources, training programmes and research are accessible and tailored specifically for people and organisations in the legal profession. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the LSB and frontline regulators to not only extend the reach and impact of our resource provisions but also to work collaboratively in developing and refining the support available to the profession.

Q9: Further Measures

LawCare would welcome the LSB taking additional steps to establish wellbeing as an integral component of its diversity framework, rather than a parallel concern. We would suggest:

- Commissioning or encouraging regular joint analysis of diversity data and wellbeing data to understand the relationship between the two.
- Working with regulators to embed mental health and wellbeing considerations explicitly in the competence frameworks and conduct standards they develop in response to this policy.
- Supporting the development of sector-wide resources, including those produced by LawCare to help firms, chambers and in-house teams translate regulatory expectations into practical cultural change.
- Encouraging regulators to engage with the lived experiences of those who have left the profession, as well as those within it, to understand the full impact of non-inclusion.

Conclusion

LawCare welcomes this consultation and the LSB's commitment to strengthening the regulatory framework for a diverse and inclusive legal profession. The evidence is clear that diversity, wellbeing, and professional performance are interconnected; a profession that fails on any one of them will struggle on all three.

The current moment, characterised by geopolitical uncertainty, rapid technological change, and a workforce showing obvious signs of strain, makes this work a pressing need requiring urgent action. The profession needs to draw on all available talent, bring in diverse perspectives to navigate complex challenges, and build the trust of the public it serves. This is only possible if it is genuinely diverse, inclusive, and supportive of the wellbeing of its members.

We would welcome the opportunity to contribute further to the implementation of this policy and to work collaboratively with the LSB and regulators to support tangible actions that will lead to a sustainable and inclusive profession.