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Section 34 Consultation  
Legal Services Regulatory Authority (the “**Authority**”)  
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## **Consultation on Barriers for Early Career Solicitors and Barristers and Increasing Diversity**

Dear LSRA

This submission is made by the Dublin Solicitors Bar Association (the “**DSBA**”) in respect of the Authority’s consultation on economic and other barriers for early career solicitors and barristers. The DSBA is Ireland’s largest bar association. It promotes and represents the welfare and interests of its Dublin-based solicitor members. This submission will therefore focus primarily on the LSRA’s work as it affects solicitors, rather than barristers.

The DSBA welcomes the work being undertaken by the Authority (upon request from the Minister) in preparing a report with recommendations on economic and other barriers faced by young solicitors and barristers in entering the legal profession. We note that in requesting the report, the Minister has asked the Authority to pay particular attention to “equity of access and entry into the legal professions, and the objective of achieving greater diversity within the professions”. The DSBA supports any initiative which aims to improve equity of access to, and achieve greater diversity within, the legal professions.

The DSBA notes that there are now more female solicitors than male solicitors which suggests that entry barriers for early career solicitors on the basis of gender are much less than they may have been in years gone by. Beyond some research on gender, there is little or no research on diversity within the legal profession in Ireland – including on the basis of other ‘protected characteristics’ under equality legislation such as race, sexual orientation, religion, civil status, family status, disability, membership of the Travelling community - of which we are aware. However, the DSBA recognises there is a perception that the diversity of the profession does not reflect the diversity of society, and welcomes any initiative to investigate and address this.

The Younger Members’ Committee (YMC) of the DSBA was pleased to participate as a member of the External Reference Group earlier this year assisting the Authority with the data collection stage of its research. In particular, YMC members consulted with the committee’s network of early career solicitors (including trainees) and provided input and feedback to the Authority in relation to the topics and themes for the online questionnaires/surveys to be sent to solicitors. The YMC believes that the questions on survey address the issues and concerns of its network who were consulted during the process.

In particular, some of the issues and concerns raised in consultation with the YMC include the following:

- costs of training
- remuneration of trainee solicitors during their in-office training
- barriers for those looking to switch career to the legal profession rather than entering straight from an undergraduate level after finishing secondary school

These issues are all addressed in the survey questions, and the YMC expects that valuable insights on these, and other issues, will be gleaned from the completion of the surveys.

Separately, as result of the impact of Covid-19 restrictions over the past year, the legal profession has had to adapt and embrace significant technological and other changes on an unprecedented scale in order to continue to function and serve the needs of clients. These changes have generally included a lesser reliance on purely hardcopy files and materials and an increased use of remote working facilities; resulting in a greater number of solicitors being able to work from home where possible. The DSBA expects that the increasing use and normalisation of remote working and electronic file management across the profession will ultimately serve not only to reduce the actual costs of legal services to clients but could also help to reduce some existing barriers of entry to the profession.

The availability of remote training and education should reduce the high financial costs for trainee solicitors associated with same, including by easing the requirement to physically attend the professional practice course at Blackhall Place. Similarly, the increasing use by the courts and other bodies of remote hearings and e-filing systems may help to reduce other barriers faced by people who wish to access the legal profession, including by helping to reduce administrative, travel and other costs, including childcare costs. Greater availability of remote working may also increase the pool of available firms offering training contacts for prospective candidates.

The DSBA and the YMC would be happy to assist the Authority further in any way we can.

Yours sincerely

**Joe O'Malley**  
**DSBA President**