



Legal Services Regulatory Authority introduces legal partnerships as an alternative business structure for legal services providers

6 in 10 legal practitioners surveyed welcome legal partnerships as a positive development for Irish legal services

1 in 5 law firms likely to become a legal partnership in next five years

Press release: 8th October 2024

The Legal Services Regulatory Authority (LSRA) today marks the introduction of a new business structure which for the first time allows solicitors to form partnerships with barristers and barristers to form partnerships with other barristers to deliver legal services to consumers.

The introduction of legal partnerships broadens the scope of business models available to legal practitioners, allowing for greater flexibility and diversity of services delivered. Prior to the introduction of legal partnerships, only solicitors were permitted to form partnerships with other solicitors.

Survey of legal practitioners

In preparation for the introduction of legal partnerships, the LSRA commissioned Ipsos B&A to conduct a survey of legal practitioners which found that 6 in 10 were in favour of the new business structure, with 1 in 5 indicating that their law firm would likely become a solicitor-barrister partnership in the next five years.

The survey found that legal practitioners who were in favour of legal partnerships held the view that the new business structure would lead to efficiencies and cost savings by sharing the resources of solicitors and barristers. Specialised services and greater levels of efficiency by combining skills are the top two selected from a list of benefits of becoming a solicitor-barrister legal partnership.

Legal practitioners surveyed saw benefits of legal partnerships accruing in many areas of law, with 'Litigation and Dispute Resolution' and 'Environmental Planning' being the areas that solicitors believe will benefit the most from their introduction.

The overriding goal for the introduction of legal partnerships is to provide a fresh offering to the legal services market whilst upholding the LSRA's statutory objectives including advancing the public interest, promoting competition, protecting the interest of consumers and encouraging an independent, strong and effective legal profession. The introduction of legal partnerships will also see benefits for clients by providing the option of an integrated service or 'one stop shop' for legal services.



Commenting ahead of a legal partnerships launch event today, Dr Brian Doherty, CEO of the LSRA, said:

“Legal partnerships are an innovation in the Irish legal services market which will help modernise the provision of legal services and yield benefits for both legal practitioners and clients alike. Barristers and solicitors practising in partnerships will benefit from the efficiencies that flow from a group practice, such as being able to share backroom costs and client work, as well as risks. Consumers in turn will be offered expanded choices when availing of legal services.

“Furthermore, the ability for two or more barristers to operate in partnerships will promote wider employment opportunities and career development in that profession, in addition to the existing models of either self-employed sole traders or in employment. We know from our recent research on barriers facing early career solicitors and barristers that there is strong appetite, in particularly among junior barristers, for alternative business models in which to practice.

“Over the past number of years the LSRA has undertaken extensive preparatory work to ensure the best possible regulatory framework is in place for this new business model. We would like to thank our stakeholders, including the Law Society of Ireland, the Bar of Ireland and the Honourable Society of King’s Inn as well as insurance companies and State bodies for their input and insights as we worked to establish the regulatory framework and bring to life legal partnerships in the Irish legal services sector.”

Commenting on the introduction of legal partnerships, Minister for Justice Helen McEntee TD, said:

“The commencement of the new Legal Partnerships regulations is a welcome development in our ongoing efforts to modernise and diversify the offerings of the Irish legal services sector. Legal partnerships allow for the further growth of our legal services sector and an increase the range of professional opportunities for legal practitioners.

“Importantly, this new business model also offers the potential for a more flexible and cost-efficient service for clients, reducing the stress for those who need to seek legal advice, expertise or representation and is another step towards our goal of making access to justice, cheaper, faster and more efficient.”

Notes to editors:

About the LSRA

The Legal Services Regulatory Authority is an independent statutory body set up under the Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 with a range of functions. It is responsible for regulating the provision of legal services by legal practitioners (barristers and solicitors) and ensuring the maintenance and improvement of standards in the provision of legal services.



About legal partnerships:

A legal partnership is a partnership formed under Irish law by written agreement by two or more legal practitioners (solicitors or barristers) for the purpose of providing legal services. At least one partner in a legal partnership must be a practising barrister. Barristers who are on the Roll of Practising Barristers and solicitors who hold valid practising certificates can form a legal partnership.

Legal partnerships are an innovation introduced in section 100 of the Legal Services Regulation Act which provides that a legal practitioner may provide legal services as a partner in, or an employee of, a legal partnership. Section 100, and a number of other sections of the Act relating to legal partnerships, commenced on 25 September 2024.

The operation and management of legal partnerships is governed by the new Legal Services Regulation Act 2015 (Legal Partnerships) Regulations 2024 (S.I. No. 489 of 2024) which commenced on 26 September 2024.

Survey of legal practitioners:

The Ipsos B&A survey of attitudes towards legal partnerships surveyed 213 senior legal practitioners from 201 small, medium and large law firms across the country. The survey findings include:

- The level of awareness of legal partnerships is limited, with 7 in 10 (73%) saying they have little knowledge of the topic, and 15% of respondents saying it was the first time they were hearing of it.
- The majority (61%) see the introduction of legal partnerships in Ireland as a positive development for the legal services market, while 24% say it's not a positive development.
- Increased liability protection and enhanced collaboration between solicitors and barristers are the two main reasons for holding a positive view of solicitor-barrister legal partnerships
- 46% see the introduction of legal partnerships as a positive innovation for the provision of legal services, while 39% say it will be positive for consumers.
- All areas of law are seen to have the potential to benefit from the introduction of legal partnerships, with litigation and dispute resolution (62%) and environmental/planning law (61%) being seen as the most likely to benefit.
- About 1 in 5 (19%) respondents believe it is likely that their firm will become a solicitor-barrister legal partnership in the next 5 years.
- Specialised services (81%) and greater efficiencies by combining the skills (72%) are the top two selected from a list of benefits of becoming a solicitor-barrister legal partnership.
- Shared expertise/specialisation (28%) and cost sharing (23%) are seen by solicitors as the main reasons barristers may wish to form barrister-barrister legal partnerships.

The entire survey can be found at the following link - <https://www.lsr.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/LSRA-IPSOS-Survey-on-LPs-FINAL.pdf>

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