

PRESS RELEASE (22 May 2008):

### **AWS and Law Society joining forces to address pay inequalities for women**

A Law Society survey published this week found that male solicitors earn on average £19,000 more than females, whilst white solicitors earn on average £10,000 more than black and minority ethnic solicitors.

Responding to a challenge from Fiona Woolf, past president of the Law Society and past chair of the Association of Women Solicitors, the AWS today launched an equal pay campaign, which runs over the next two years, to draw attention to inequalities of pay in the legal sector, explore its causes and suggest potential solutions.

The challenge was made by Fiona Woolf at the AWS's inaugural Fiona Woolf lecture in light of the publication of the Law Society's latest salary survey of the legal sector.

The Law Society survey found that the median yearly salary for male solicitors was £60,000 compared to £41,000 for females - a median pay gap of 32%. However after taking into account various factors including grade, post-qualification experience (PQE), region, size of firm worked in, breaks taken, hours worked and area of law (family and conveyancing), female solicitors earned on average 7.6% less than male solicitors.

Fiona Woolf challenged the AWS to explore the pay gap and find solutions. She said: "The gap is a symptom of the difficulties we in the legal sector are facing as we try to implement new ways of working that take account of contemporary realities. If legal practices are to win the war for talent, we need to find ways to make flexible work successful - not just for women, but everyone who is attempting to juggle a career with other commitments."

The AWS has a membership of almost 18,000 and, speaking at the launch of the campaign, Fiona Fitzgerald, chair of the AWS, said:

"The legal profession is becoming more and more female. 60% of last year's intake of solicitors were women and 43.4% of practising certificates are now held by women. However, to take private practice as an example, only 21.8% of women solicitors are partners, compared to 49% of male solicitors.

"The pay gap demonstrates not only that many women are not equally rewarded for equal work but, most significantly, that women are not making the progress through the profession that they should. We will work with government, employers and, most importantly, solicitors to debate the causes and identify steps that we all can take. These issues are being worked on across the profession and we need to spread best practice and keep the pressure on for change."

The survey also looked at ethnicity. It found the median earnings were £50,000 for white solicitors and £40,000 for black and minority ethnic (BME) groups - a median pay gap of 20%. After taking account of gender, grade, firm size, region, PQE and hours worked, BME solicitors earned, on average, 17% less than white solicitors.

Sailesh Mehta, chair of the Society of Asian Lawyers, says:

"The whole profession should be concerned to bridge the wide gap in income between

BME and white lawyers. The 17% gap is likely to increase in the near future, as more BME lawyers feel the disproportionate effects of the LSC's squeeze on income. We believe the Law Society has taken a positive step in drawing attention to the inequalities of pay in the legal sector and we will seek to work with the Law Society and senior partners in larger firms to investigate the real causes of the problem and to implement practical solutions to redress the balance."

Des Hudson, Law Society chief executive, says: "These findings are concerning and we are committed to working with the AWS and BME groups to understand why these pay differentiations are so wide. The launch of the BME Forum will provide the Law Society and BME groups with the opportunity to look at the issues more closely and present suggestions as to how to tackle them. However we can only do so much in identifying the problem and suggesting how it may be eradicated but senior partners and HR professionals in firms must be prepared to work with us to slim the gap."

### Ends

Notes to editors:

Bill Cole, Law Society research manager, says:

"The research undertaken is the most thorough and comprehensive the Law Society's Strategic Research Unit has conducted in this area, based as it is on the most complete data set yet assembled.

"This research does not, however, fully explain all of the differences in pay levels found in the profession. Whilst the research can be used to identify and control for the impact of some factors, such as the fact that women solicitors on average have fewer years' experience than their male counterparts, there may be other factors at play which mean that the survey cannot unambiguously provide reasons for the pay differentials we have observed. Hopefully, further research in the area will provide a better understanding of this."

For more information or to get involved, please contact the AWS [chair](#) or the [PR officer](#).