

Sharp gender gap as partnerships shrink

By Neil Rose

Male solicitors are still more than twice as likely to be partners as their female counterparts, it emerged this week.

However, research also uncovered a continuing squeeze on partnership that is having a major impact on both.

The Law Society's annual statistical report for the year to 31 July 2006 found that 40% of male solicitors are partners, compared to just 18% of women.

A large disparity remained even among older solicitors where partnership is more likely. Some 60% of male solicitors with between ten and 19 years' post-qualification experience are partners

or sole practitioners, compared to 40% of similarly qualified women.

Overall, 31% of solicitors were partners last year, compared to 42% in 2001, when 52% of male and 24% of female solicitors were partners.

Whereas in 2001 there were two admitted staff for every principal, five years later the ratio moved close to 3:1.

Partnership expert Ronnie Fox, of City firm Fox, cited two reasons for this. 'It is less attractive to become a partner in smaller and mid-sized firms because they are under pressure,' he said. It is also harder to make partner in the larger firms, which are keeping a tight control of numbers so as to boost profits per partner.

However, the advance of women solicitors continues apace. Nearly 43% of solicitors with practising certificates were women last year. Over the past decade, the number of women solicitors has more than doubled (up by 108%), compared to a 29% rise for male solicitors.

Law Society President Fiona Woolf said: 'There has been a steady improvement over recent years in women's representation at more senior levels of the profession, but we recognise that more needs to be done... we encourage all firms to develop and implement policies and practices which will have a sustainable effect on equality and diversity.'

Continued on page 3

Partners

Continued from page 1

Dawn Dixon, outgoing chairwoman of the Association of Women Solicitors, said she was not surprised by the partnership disparity, but warned that more generally the profession needs to work out how it will cope when the large number of women solicitors under the age of 35 decide to have children.

'There are a lot more women lawyers who want children than partnership,' she said.

There were a record 104,543 solicitors with practising certificates last year, and 131,347 on the roll.