



Case study: CILEx Regulation

Quantitative sample: Among the 7290 survey respondents, 631 were CILEx Regulation members.

Compared to the majority of other bodies in the collaborative¹, CILEx Regulation survey respondents were significantly more likely to...

- be aged 29 or under or 30-39, female, affected by menopause, have a health condition and/or disability and/or be neurodivergent, from a lower socioeconomic background (based on parental occupation aged 14), work part-time, work in the private sector, live in the South West
- have 2 or 3+ 'marginalised characteristics'– following intersectionality proxy used in this study
- disagree with the following statements:
 - 'My unique personal attributes, characteristics, and background are valued within the profession'
 - 'The profession is inclusive regardless of socioeconomic background or caring responsibilities'
- believe that, in terms of accessing jobs in the profession, people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face greater discrimination than others
- have neither witnessed nor experienced the following since the start of 2019:
 - Being unfairly spoken over or not listened to in meetings
 - Colleagues taking sole credit for shared efforts
 - Feeling uncomfortable in the workplace
 - Being excluded from opportunities for progression/to work on 'stretch projects etc.
- have personally experienced Slights, snubs or other 'microaggressions' since the beginning of 2019
- have experienced the following barriers when joining the profession:
 - Worries about the cost/affordability of the training and qualifications
 - Concerns about being discriminated against because of which university you attended
 - Concerns about not having completed higher education/attended university
 - A lack of social/professional networks with people already in the profession
 - A lack of opportunities (internships, training contracts etc.) in the area where you lived

¹ Presented are metrics in which responses from CILEx Regulation were significantly different from over half (at least 6) of the 11 other bodies in the Collaborative

- Worries about “fitting in” due to being a minority in the profession (e.g. on the basis of gender, ethnicity, social class etc.)
- Utilised the following when joining the profession:
 - Internships or work experience
 - Bursary or scholarship to help with tuition and examination fees
 - Support and encouragement from family and friends
- Have considered leaving the profession as a result of concerns related to discrimination or to the lack of diversity, inclusion and equality
- Have considered leaving the profession or their organisation mainly because of:
 - Unequal pay and/or benefits
 - Burnout or unmanageable workload
- Believe ‘Promoting flexible working arrangements’ is ineffective for improving workplace culture

Qualitative sample: Among the 99 focus group participants, 4 were CILEx regulation members.

Perceptions and experiences of diversity at CILEx

Whilst the majority of respondents to the survey were women, participants in our focus groups discussed how law professions traditionally have a history of being male, white and middle class: “law was seen as stale dominated by men, most people from a middle class, upper class, white background. Now you see the trainees who are coming through the firm and it’s much more diverse” (CILEx member, 14E). Many, however, still feel that the profession is “male-dominated. As far as I’ve known, it’s always been more males than females. You have to fight quite a lot to get your voice heard as a female” (CILEx member, 7E). This particularly affected women with intersecting identities: “I do feel certainly in the legal profession ethnic minority women in particular do have to double up the work in order to prove their potential. I think that is due to stereotypes that exist around us in the first place” (CILEx member, 4E).

Gender inequality was often discussed around promotion and equal pay, with one participant explaining how she was denied transparency about her pay: “You get told you’re at the higher end and you just have to trust them. I don’t believe them.” (CILEx member, 7E). Another participant explained how in order to get promoted, she had to change jobs: “[...] promotions and pay rise, I’ve always gotten by moving law firms to the point that my current law firm has actually said, ‘Please don’t leave. If you really want a promotion, talk to us first.’” (CILEx member, 4E)

A factor that was frequently discussed amongst CILEx members and often intersects with gender, is pursuing a legal career alongside childcare responsibilities. One participant, for

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example, reported that her request to work 35 instead of 37.5 hours per week in order to pick her child up from school was rejected. Opportunities to socialise were also sometimes mentioned as exclusive to certain groups. For those not drinking alcohol, for instance, events that centre around drinks may not feel inclusive: “This firm is the first [where] someone’s actually thought that ‘Oh, she doesn’t drink alcohol so maybe we need to have a non-alcoholic event, a team night out.” (CILEx member, 4E) Equally, certain roles within the legal profession, such as legal secretaries, may be excluded from social events: “I haven’t yet [socialised] because I haven’t reached that point in my career, I’m just moving from a legal secretary role which they’re not really included.” (CILEx member, 7E).

Views on improving EDI in the legal profession

The people we spoke to described important improvements with regards to diversity in the profession and appreciate the visibility of people from minority groups in senior roles: “Currently the president of the Law Society is a South Asian woman, a Muslim woman, and I think that has helped to change minds.” (CILEx member, 4E)

Compared to other professional bodies, the legal profession was described as the most inclusive in terms of becoming qualified. Participants appreciated both the opportunity to study part-time and a university degree not being a pre-requisite. This also impacted in how far people felt like they belong in the profession, especially those who perceived the legal profession was inaccessible for them, for example because of their socio-economic background, ethnicity or caring responsibilities: “I think it’s really good that there are other options now to get people into qualifications without having a Uni degree. For me, people say to me all the time that I can do more than I give myself credit for. Which is why I’m determined to finish this course” (CILEx member, 14E). The qualification was also discussed as a way for legal secretaries to ensure their future in the profession: “legal secretary appears to be a dying breed. Legal secretaries retire and they don’t get replaced. [...] If I want to retain a job for the next 15 years before I retire, I need that qualification to be a paralegal rather than a legal secretary” (CILEx member, 14E).

Whether someone can pursue a qualification, however, seems to depend on having supportive managers and an employer that is willing to offer flexibility: “It really does depend on where you work and which law firm. Literally, everyone has a different approach” (CILEx member, 4E). Some said that due to their financial restraints, they would have not been able to pursue a career in law, was it not for their manager: “I’ve had my share of terrible managers and good managers, and I can’t really stress how important that is, a manager’s role in your career progression. Me having a supportive manager made the difference between being a qualified lawyer or not because I couldn’t have afforded the additional legal training that I had to do. Had I not qualified, I would’ve been stuck in a cycle of poverty as a single parent with a child” (CILEx member, 4E).

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One thing that was highlighted, is the risk that qualifications would only be required for people from certain demographics. One person we spoke to said she was told she needed a qualification before becoming a paralegal but later noticed that many colleagues who were paralegals did not have the qualification: “there are quite a lot of paralegals across my firm who don't have a law degree, but they've done the job for so long that they've just been given the title of paralegal. That's what I was given the title of, but I was told I needed to do this course” (CILEx member, 14E).

Particularities of the legal profession

Working culture of staying late within the legal profession

The working culture in law firms was described as a challenge for the legal profession, with late working expected by most employers which can create or exacerbate mental health issues: “right from the beginning when you step into law school, they tell you it's going to be a very busy profession. You need to commit to the hours. Obviously, we all sign up to it and then it is what it is, no one's lied, no one's told us that it's going to be an easy ride, but it's almost sad that actually, why should we have to be at constant risk of burnout all the time in order to succeed in the profession?” (CILEx member, 4E). Expectations around working late also interfere with childcare responsibilities, limiting the access to certain jobs for those with children: “you'll be expected to stay till 8:00 PM, 9:00 PM, 10 o'clock at night if a big deal is on and you have to stay and you have to finish it. Obviously, that doesn't work for me because my childcare commitment” (CILEx member, 14E).