

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy 2026-28

Foreword: Jonathan Rees, CRL chair

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is at the core of all we do as an employer, regulator and partner at CILEx Regulation. We launched our first EDI Strategy in 2022 and have been working hard since then both to understand and address the challenges facing CILEX members and ensure consumers, whatever their background, get the services they need.

The CILEX community is already generally more diverse than other parts of the legal services market. For example, three quarters of Chartered Legal Executives are women, 6% attended a fee-paying school compared to 21% of solicitors, and far fewer come from a professional socio-economic background compared with, say, solicitors. 35% of CILEX members are from a professional socioeconomic background compared to 37% of the UK population and 57% of solicitors.



J Rees, CRL Chair

However, Chartered Legal Executives and paralegals face many challenges: it can be more difficult for them to secure progression within firms, their qualifications are not always fully recognized, and we are still working to secure broad practice rights across all areas of law. It is hugely disappointing that 81% of CILEX members think that the legal profession looks down on them.

We all know that the legal services sector EDI record needs to improve considerably. The recently published Harman Review lays bare the cultural and conduct challenges facing the Bar. In response to such challenges felt across the sector, the Legal Services Board have identified EDI as one of their five policy priorities for 2025/26. We look forward to working with them and other regulators on this.

We have made a good start over the last three years, especially on data collection, research, and raising the profile. But there is still much more to do. Our new strategy reaffirms our commitment to doing all we can to ensure fair access for all within the legal services market, including both professionals and consumers. Over the next three years, we will improve access to the profession, support CILEX members to progress, ensure consumers are well served and role model best practice. We are confident that by working together, we can build a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive legal profession for the benefit of everyone.

Achievements

Since launching our first EDI strategy, we have made good progress against our objectives. In particular, we have invested in our EDI data collection so that we can track progress and make evidence-based decisions and interventions – our data collection framework is attracting interest from others.

We have worked with partners to commission research. Our Beyond Buzzwords research, commissioned alongside a wide range of professional bodies and representative organisations, looked at how EDI initiatives have been experienced. The research highlights the gap between goals and meaningful change – while some progress has been made in the profile of new entrants to the sector, many still see the law profession dominated by males of white ethnicity from middle and upper class backgrounds. Indeed, the research found that CILEX members did not think law was inclusive or valued individual's personal attributes, characteristics or background.

We have also facilitated cross-sector discussion in a workshop entitled Prejudice Suppresses Talent – what actions can achieve legal sector equality. This brought together legal regulators, professional bodies, the Legal Services Board (LSB), Ministry of Justice, and representatives from the Legal Services Consumer Panel and the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion to identify key themes and challenges that prevent a more equal profession.

Objectives for 2026-2028

1. **Improve access to the legal profession**

We will make it easier for people from all backgrounds to enter and progress in the profession without compromising the high standards we set.

2. **Help the regulated community realise their potential**

We will work to tackle issues of progression and recognition within the CILEX community.

3. **Serve all consumers fairly**

We will work to address barriers to consumers, regardless of background or circumstance, accessing the legal services they need.

4. **Be a more inclusive CRL**

We are committed to being a role model for the sector by ensuring our own organization is inclusive in all its actions and decisions.

These aims are underpinned by three core principles:

Evidence

We will continue to invest in our EDI data collection, utilizing all opportunities to collect diversity data from regulated individuals, firms, and education and skills providers. This data will inform our actions and measure our progress. We will also identify research opportunities to broaden our insight and identify appropriate and proportionate regulatory interventions.

Partnership

We recognise that we cannot change the legal services sector overnight or alone. We will collaborate closely with key stakeholders, including CILEX, other regulators, and the LSB to further our strategic objectives.

Transparency

We are committed to acting transparently in the public interest. We will regularly report on our progress on EDI issues through our Annual Report and open Board papers, ensuring accountability and visibility.

1. Improve access to the legal profession

The CILEX route to legal qualification has opened up the profession to many who may not have pursued a career in law. The CILEX route, for example, does not require a degree and is ideal for those who want or need to combine studying with earning or other life circumstances or commitments. In the 2022 CILEX member [insight survey](#), 81% of respondents said that without CILEX they wouldn't have a career in the legal profession.

We want to continue to make it easier for people from all backgrounds to enter and progress in the profession without compromising the high standards we set. We intend to ensure pathways to a legal career are open, accessible and fit for purpose.

Over the next three years, we will:

- Work with CILEX to promote the Chartered Legal Executive Level 6 Apprenticeships Standards as one of the very few funded routes for apprentices wishing to gain practice rights and become an authorised person as defined by the Legal Services Act.
- Make it simpler for CILEX professionals to seek practice rights available to them and consider whether further pathways should be developed to support career development and progression and the needs of the evolving legal sector.
- Implement standalone litigation practice rights changes to enable those with the knowledge, skills and experience for litigation to qualify without further unnecessary study.
- Review our advocacy standards to ensure they do not prevent CILEX members from enrolling, ensure any relevant courses are accessible and meet the needs of the market.
- Consider how future education and training pathways incorporate EDI into their syllabus.
- Support, where appropriate, growth and competition in the education and skills sector to improve access, choice and quality.

2. Help the regulated community realise their potential

The lack of progression and recognition is a major obstacle faced by many in the CILEX community. 88% of CILEX members say that the legal profession is ignorant about what they do and 70% believe that, in comparison to other lawyers, CILEX lawyers are paid less for doing the same work.

We aim to support the CILEX community by demonstrating the benefits of the CILEX route, communicating these to address long-standing biases in the legal sector and supporting, where appropriate, those who wish to progress. Over the course of this strategy, we will:

- Promote the value and rigour of the qualifications we accredit and ensure standards keep pace with sector developments.
- Ensure our sector-leading ongoing competency requirements continue to promote EDI and consider whether further requirements are necessary.
- Support more of those we regulate to set up their own companies by ensuring barriers to market entry are proportionate and the requisite and appropriate support is available.
- Work with authorised entities to ensure they consider EDI and pursue appropriate and proportionate EDI policies.

3. Serve all consumers fairly

Many consumers are unable to access legal services which could help them because of cost, a lack of information or other systemic barriers. These barriers can be particularly acute for those who may be at a disadvantage.

We aim to ensure that all consumers, regardless of background or circumstance, can access the legal services they need. We plan to:

- Build on the digital exclusion research undertaken with the BSB, ICAEW and CLC to develop interventions to address barriers identified.
- Work with stakeholders to ensure consumers are well informed, including ensuring our website is clear and making Legal Choices more accessible and used.
- Revive our plans for Law Firm in a Box to reduce barriers to entry and help CILEX members reach and serve underrepresented consumers.

4. Be a more inclusive CRL

We are committed to role modelling best practice; we will continue to be an inclusive regulator in all our actions, decisions and composition. Over the next three years, we will:

- Build on our CRL diversity data 2024 by continuing to collate and publish diversity data from our Board, panels, committees and staff. Through this we will endeavour to ensure that our staff and individuals reflect the regulated community as far as is practicable in a small organisation.
- Recognise and celebrate our own diversity.
- Ensure our recruitment, induction and training processes for both office holders and staff promote EDI and remove, as far as is possible, the risk of unconscious bias.
- Consider recruiting a professional Board apprentice. We will look to build diversity at Board level by considering a professional Board apprentice role in 2026, giving a younger professional the opportunity to join the Board.
- Collate and publish a demographic breakdown of our enforcement decisions to ensure our decisions are fair and free from bias.

Conclusion

Achieving a more equal, diverse and inclusive legal profession is a long-distance race not a sprint. It is about culture change, education and ongoing commitment. We have successfully laid some of the building blocks through better data, more evidence and research and building strong partnerships within and outside the legal sector. We will now build on that with commitment, perseverance and enthusiasm to make this change happen.