

Devon & Somerset Law Society Annual Membership Survey 2009

Executive Summary

In April 2009, 1105 members and associate members were asked to complete a three page questionnaire to help DASLS assess how well it has been doing. There was a particular focus on whether its services and strategic plan were in line with members' needs and views.

232 members (21%) responded in part or full to the questions raised. The geographical spread of responses appears to be representative of the membership in the various areas of Devon and Somerset. The vast majority came from solicitors in private practice. Just 5 came from in-house solicitors, 4 in local government / magistrates' service and one in education. Around 25% of returns were from members who have had involvement in the Society at sub-committee or committee level. It is thought that the respondents to the survey are a representative cross section of members.

Respondents were asked to rate DASLS main services; 95% said that training course provision was either excellent or good, 87% said the same about the recruitment agency and 85% were equally enthusiastic about the newsletter. These services were generally used by the majority of the membership. Around 50% of returns indicated they had attended social events with 80% of those rating them as excellent or good. The mediation, international and complaints handling services were not used by more than 25% of respondents but when used scored 100%, 92% and 97% respectively as excellent or good. The facebook group is used by just 11%.

Comments suggest that DASLS services are well focused for the membership profile and that the Recruitment, Social and Newsletter are valued. Particularly positive comments were made regarding the CPD training services and also the Professional Skills Course offered to trainee solicitors. There is some concern that there are fewer courses in the Exeter area now that the Society has grown but a similar number of voices calling for more courses in other areas of the two counties.

DASLS staff are highly praised throughout the returns with comments such as "Very friendly & helpful but professional & efficient".

Members are generally aware of the work of the committees but there is a clear steer that more information needs to be disseminated about the work that goes on in the background using either the newsletter, website or electronic updates.

95% of members agree that DASLS should strive to become a strong regional body. The remaining 5% are neutral on this topic. 72% support the view that DASLS should encourage all legal professionals to take part in the Society's activities, 22% are neutral and 6% disagree. There are no strong opinions

about lifestyle benefits with 58% having a neutral position about the Society offering these services.

Demand for the Newsletter to be e.mailed just tips the balance over 50%. There is a strong preference for training, social event and other updates to be supplied electronically.

The views expressed say that the Society is helpful and supportive with friendly and approachable people. It provides relevant services and facilitates a good network for local lawyers. It provides representation at a local and national level. The training courses appear to be overwhelmingly what DASLS does best followed by recruitment, representation, communication and information. International work and social events are also valued by those members who take part. There is significant support for more training, representation and lobbying work.

Respondents do say that the Society could do better particularly in respect of representing members at Chancery Lane and in the media. DASLS does not always communicate its activities well and needs to offer more opportunities to mix with fellow professionals. Members believe that it struggles to involve younger lawyers. There is also concern that members on the edges of the Society's area feel isolated from the main activity.

Communication is a key theme of many responses with demand for better and relevant contact. Where possible, practical guidance is wanted. Some members question the benefits of international activity, others would like to see less waffle in newsletters. One return asks if the annual dinner is really what people want and should the format be changed.

The majority of concluding comments are supportive of the Society and its strategic approach. There is disillusionment with the national Law Society from some members and DASLS is seen as an antidote.

Key areas for action:

- Stronger marketing of services and membership benefits.
- Increased use of e.mail for communications.
- Better and relevant communication from the committees.
- Continued work towards a regional presence and the inclusion of the whole legal profession.
- Continued profile raising and lobbying activity to be undertaken and to be better publicised to the membership.
- Networking opportunities with other professions to be arranged.
- Proactive recruitment of young lawyers and other unrepresented profiles of membership to the committees.
- More focus on the whole of the Devon & Somerset area.