

The Irish Legal System, Law Libraries and Legal Information

Guest Editorial

It is fifteen years since I last collaborated in an “Irish issue”. In that time the profession has changed in many ways. While there are a growing number of women entering both the professions, the Minister for Equality has expressed serious concerns about the lack of women judges¹. Comparative figures for women on the bench are: 1996 Supreme Court 1 out of 7; High Court 2 out of 20; in 2011 – Supreme 2 out of 8; High 5 out of 37. In 1995 the figures for members of The Law Library were 985 made up of: 138 silks, of whom 6 were female; and 847 juniors, of whom 284 (just over a third) were female. In June 2011 it is: 2,247 made up of 311 silks, of whom 51 are female; and 1,936 juniors, of whom 867 (45%) are female. However the composition of the Bar Council does not reflect the overall proportions. On the senior panel there is only 1 female out of 10, while on the junior panel there are 2 out of 10. At a time when Ireland has seen record economic prosperity and is now in the throes of a serious recession, there are many unemployed solicitors and many members of the bar unable to make a living. John Furlong’s detailed article on the law firm sector gives current figures and trends for the solicitors’ profession². Much has changed in the provision of legal information in Ireland also. We have more tools and services at our disposal than at any other time and yet the picture is anything but perfect.

Patricia Rickard-Clarke’s article on access to justice outlines, quite starkly, some of the short-comings in the current system of legislative provision and access to our laws in Dublin. As a measure of democracy, access to

the laws that govern the citizen is a fundamental. But, in spite of free online access to statutes, she outlines that meaningful access to information is denied. Our statute book is a tangled weave from many different parliaments, and has serious shortcomings: secondary legislation amends primary; multiple amendments without consolidation or reissue; the practise of the “buried amendment”; no index to secondary legislation and much more.

A further disadvantage is that, since the publication of the Official Languages Act, which requires simultaneous publication of legislation in Irish and English, the text of many Acts, including those with criminal sanctions and consequences, is not available although they are in force. A recent example is that of the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010, 22 sections of which came into force in August 2010, yet the Act was only published in March 2011!

The reader will also find in this issue: scholarly (and even polemical) articles on current issues in the legal systems both North and South; accounts of the major information services, how to find them and how to use them; articles on publishers; and articles on Law Libraries North and South both current and historical.

We are grateful to all of our contributors for giving of their time and expertise, and sharing with you a brief insight into the world of legal information on the island of Ireland.

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Footnotes

¹Irish Times Friday June 24 2011.

²Furlong, John (2011) The Law Firm Sector in Ireland: An Overview. *Legal Information Management* 11(3).