

Statistics reflect pace of transformation in the attorneys' profession

A statistics report recently released by the Law Society of South Africa's Legal Education and Development (LEAD) division provides insight into the transformation the legal profession has undergone in the past decade.

The report includes statistics on law degree registrations and graduations, articulated clerks, admitted attorneys and permanent judges.

In terms of practising attorneys, the report shows that there has been an increase of more than 5 000 attorneys in the past decade, with 15 018 attorneys registered in 2002 and 20 754 as of April this year. Currently, 66% of attorneys are male and 34% are female; 13 509 are white, 7 079 are black, while the race of 166 was not specified.

Of the total number of practising attorneys, 11 465 are registered with the Law Society of the Northern Provinces, 5 488 with the Cape Law Society, 2 815 with the KwaZulu-Natal Law Society and 986 with the Free State Law Society.

There has been a slight increase in the number of attorneys admitted in 2011 compared to 2010, with 1 588 attorneys admitted in 2011 and 1 542 in 2010. Of those admitted in 2011, 894 were female, 694 were male, 846 were white and 737 were black, with five whose race was not specified.

With the exception of 2009, there have been more women than men admitted to the profession since 2006.

There was also an increase in the number of contracts for articles that were registered, with 2 032 registered between July 2011 and April 2012 compared to 1 793 registered between July 2010 and April 2011. Of those registered between 1 July 2011 and 1 April 2012, 1 158 were female and 874 were male.

The changing demographics are more evident in those entering and graduating from the country's universities. Of the 4 273 final-year LLB students enrolled in 2011, 3 576 graduated in the same year. Of these, 2 176 were black, 1 398 were white and the race of two students was not specified. Just under 2 000 were female.

Of the 4 702 final-year LLB students enrolled in 2012, 2 531 were female and 2 171 were male, 3 194 were black, 1 502 were white, while the race of six students was not specified.

According to the report, 7 844 students were registered for first-year law degrees (LLB, BA Law and BCom Law in 2012) compared to 7 182 in 2011. Of these, 75% were black and 53% were female.

According to the report, as of 31 March 2012 there were 233 permanent judges. Of these –

- 94 were black;
- 91 were white;
- 24 were coloured;
- 24 were Indian;
- 168 were male; and
- 65 were female.

Most of the permanent judges were white males, with a total of 71, followed by black males, with a total of 69.

The full report can be found on the Law Society of South Africa's website (www.LSSA.org.za) under 'About the LSSA', under 'About the attorneys' profession'.

* Not all universities were able to provide all the relevant information.

* Black includes coloured and Asian.

Nomfundo Manyathi,

nomfundo@derebus.org.za