
Social mobility in the Costs Lawyer profession

Results of the 2022 diversity survey



29 March 2023

Costs Lawyer Standards Board

CLSB
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About the social mobility survey

One of the regulatory objectives for legal services, as set out in section 1 of the Legal Services Act 2007, is to encourage an independent, strong, diverse and effective legal profession. In pursuit of this objective, the legal services regulators are working together to promote an inclusive legal profession in which the opportunity to build a successful career in law is available to everyone, regardless of background.

One potential barrier to a diverse and inclusive legal profession is the differential treatment of individuals – either at the start of, or during, their career – based on their socio-economic background. This is sometimes referred to as a lack of ‘social mobility’. The Social Mobility Commission describes social mobility as the link between an individual’s income and occupation and the income and occupation of their parents, and notes that the term is widely adopted as a way of describing the importance of creating opportunities for individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds to enable them to become more economically successful.¹

In order to identify barriers to social mobility in the Costs Lawyer profession, and then design interventions to help tackle those barriers, we need to know more about the socio-economic background of Costs Lawyers and how that background has influenced their experience. To that end, our 2022 diversity survey focused on social mobility issues.

We asked questions about respondents’ socio-economic backgrounds in a way that would facilitate analysis across different regions, genders, age groups and levels of progression. We asked questions in three areas – relating to parental occupation, type of school attended and parental university attendance – using categories recommended by the Social Mobility Commission to facilitate benchmarking against other groups. Ultimately, we are interested in the extent to which the Costs Lawyer profession offers a route into law for those from socially diverse backgrounds.

We received 258 responses, representing 39% of the Costs Lawyer profession.

¹ [Socio-economic diversity and inclusion: Employer’s toolkit](#), July 2021 edition, page 35.

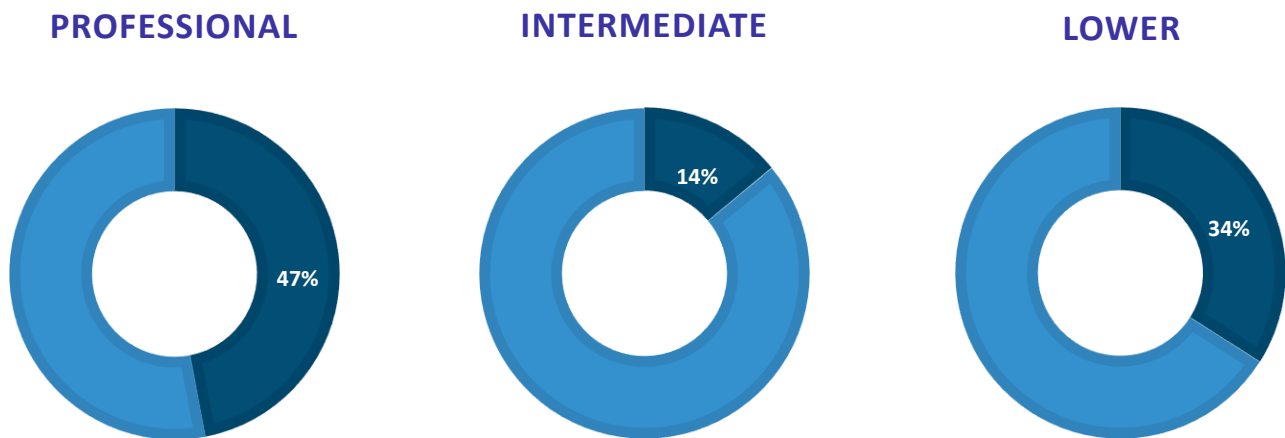
Parental occupation

The Social Mobility Commission identifies parental occupation as the best measure for assessing someone’s socio-economic background.² Our question asked respondents to identify the occupation of their main household earner when the respondent was about 14. Responses were then divided into three categories to allow for benchmarking, namely:

- Professional socio-economic backgrounds – including modern professional and traditional occupations; senior or junior managers or administrators.
- Intermediate socio-economic backgrounds – including clerical and intermediate occupations; small business owners.
- Lower socio-economic backgrounds – including technical and craft occupations; routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations; long-term unemployed.

The statistics below show the socio-economic background of Costs Lawyers based on the parental occupation measure, along with comparative data for the general population and for the largest group of other legal practitioners, namely solicitors.³

Parental occupation at age 14: Costs Lawyers

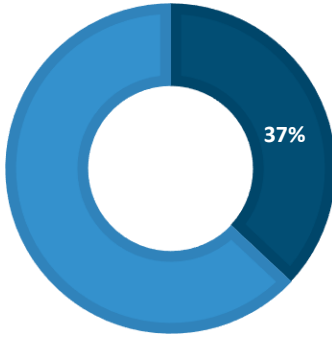


² See <https://socialmobilityworks.org/toolkit/financial-and-professional-measurement/>.

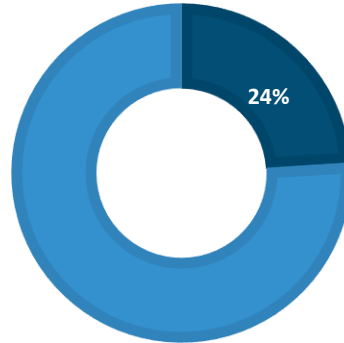
³ Note that the percentages for each group do not always total 100% as they exclude certain respondents, such as those who did not answer the question or who indicated that they preferred not to say.

Parental occupation at age 14: General population⁴

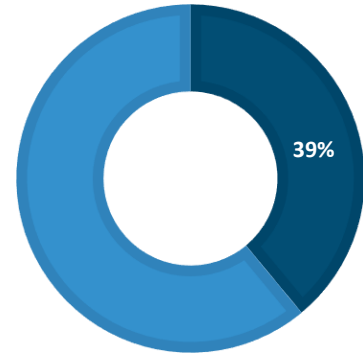
PROFESSIONAL



INTERMEDIATE

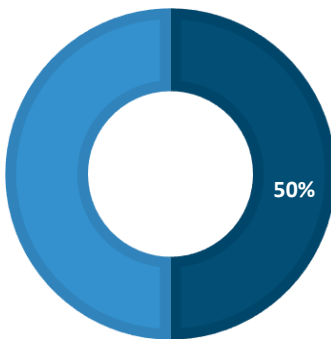


LOWER

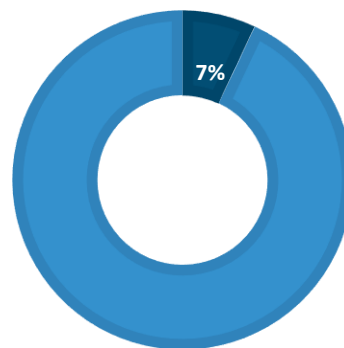


Parental occupation at age 14: Solicitors⁵

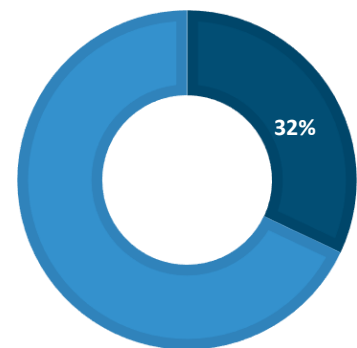
PROFESSIONAL



INTERMEDIATE



LOWER



The proportion of Costs Lawyers with a professional socio-economic background is higher than the general population (47% compared to 37%) and is slightly lower than solicitors (at 50%). The proportion of Costs Lawyers with a lower socio-economic background is lower than the general population (34% compared to 39%) and slightly higher than solicitors (32%). This suggests there is, to some degree, greater social mobility amongst Costs Lawyers than solicitors, but that more can be done to encourage a shift in the socio-economic profile of the profession toward that of the population.

⁴ 2020 data for England reported by the Social Mobility Commission at <https://socialmobilityworks.org/toolkit/financial-and-professional-measurement/>.

⁵ 2019 data reported by the Solicitors Regulation Authority at <https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/diversity-toolkit/law-firm-diversity-tool-2/>.

The survey showed that there is little difference between the socio-economic backgrounds of male and female Costs Lawyers, as measured by parental occupation. This suggests that social mobility amongst Costs Lawyers is relatively similar for men and women.

Gender	Parental occupation at age 14		
	Professional	Intermediate	Lower
Male Costs Lawyers	47%	15%	32%
Female Costs Lawyers	49%	10%	37%

There was some variance between socio-economic backgrounds across different geographic regions.⁶ The North West had both the highest proportion of respondents with a professional socio-economic background and the lowest proportion with a lower socio-economic background, suggesting that social mobility amongst Costs Lawyers may be most limited in this region (followed by the South West).

Region	Parental occupation at age 14	
	Professional	Lower
Wales	36%	43%
North West	52%	26%
North East	44%	44%
Yorkshire & Humber	38%	31%
East	43%	57%
South West	50%	32%
West Midlands	47%	35%
East Midlands	50%	40%
South East	49%	43%
London	49%	34%

⁶ Participants were asked: "In the last year, in which region did you work? (If more than one, please choose the place where you spent most of your working time.)"

Comparing parental occupation across Costs Lawyers of different ages, and across Costs Lawyers who have spent different amounts of time in the profession, we see an indication that social mobility within the profession may be decreasing over time. As a general trend, the proportion of practitioners with a professional socio-economic background is higher amongst younger and less experienced practitioners, and the proportion of practitioners with a lower socio-economic background is lower across the same groups.

Age bracket	Parental occupation at age 14	
	Professional	Lower
25-34	54%	35%
35-44	51%	33%
45-54	47%	29%
55-64	38%	42%
65+	42%	42%

Years in profession⁷	Parental occupation at age 14	
	Professional	Lower
Up to 5	48%	34%
6-15	53%	32%
16-25	48%	33%
26-40	39%	36%
40+	43%	50%

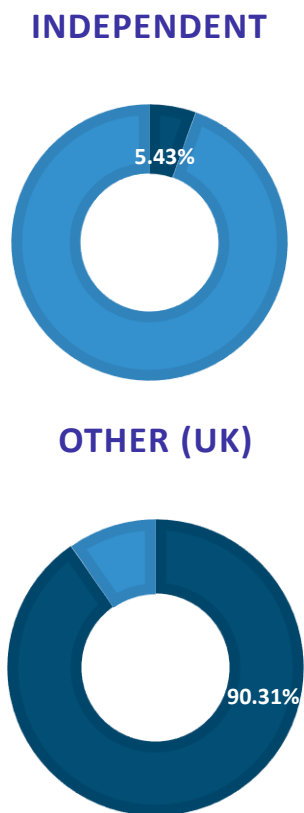
⁷ Participants were asked: “For how many years have you been practising as an authorised Costs Lawyer?”

Type of school

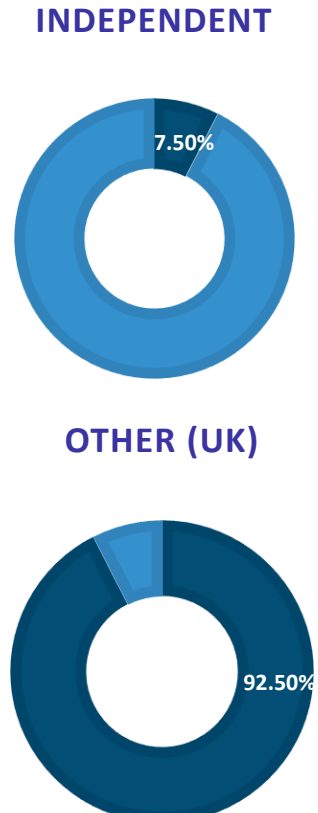
Next, we asked respondents which type of school they attended for the most time between the ages of 11 and 16. According to the Social Mobility Commission, this measure provides an indication of economic and cultural advantage.⁸

The statistics below show the proportion of Costs Lawyers that attended an independent school (without a bursary) compared to other education pathways,⁹ with comparative data for the general population and for solicitors. The data indicates that educational privilege is less prevalent amongst Costs Lawyers than amongst solicitors and the wider population.

Type of school: Costs Lawyers



Type of school: General population¹⁰



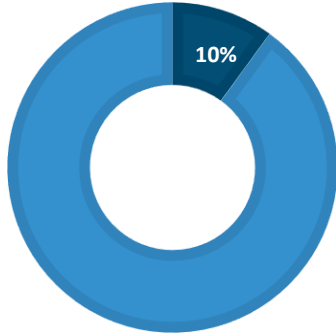
⁸ See <https://socialmobilityworks.org/toolkit/financial-and-professional-measurement/>.

⁹ Excluding those who attended school outside of the UK and who indicated they preferred not to say.

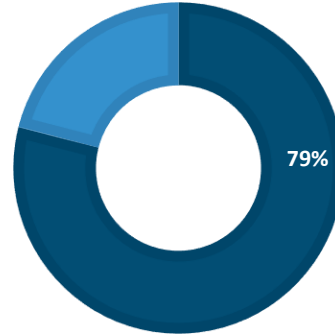
¹⁰ 2019 data for the UK reported by the Social Mobility Commission at <https://socialmobilityworks.org/toolkit/financial-and-professional-measurement/>.

Type of school: Solicitors¹¹

INDEPENDENT



OTHER (UK)



The prevalence of independent school attendance varies by region, although the relatively small number of respondents who indicated that they attended an independent school without a bursary (14 individuals in total) means that the sample size for each region is small.

Region	Costs Lawyers who attended an independent school for most of the time between ages 11 and 16
Wales	0%
North West	10%
North East	11%
Yorkshire & Humber	3%
East	14%
South West	9%
West Midlands	12%
East Midlands	0%
South East	0%
London	2%

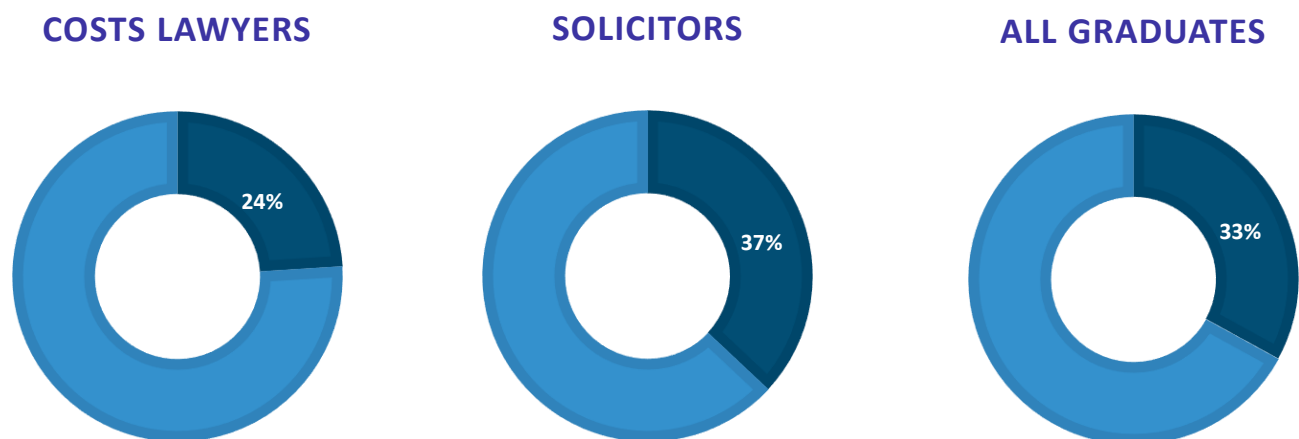
¹¹ 2019 data reported by the Solicitors Regulation Authority at <https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/diversity-toolkit/law-firm-diversity-tool-2/>.

Parental education

Finally, we asked respondents whether either of their parents attended university and gained a degree by the time the respondent was 18. According to the Social Mobility Commission, attending university gives a nuanced form of cultural advantage, as organisational cultures favour attendees. Being the ‘first in family’ to attend signals a potential lack of support to navigate university and entry into the graduate workforce.¹² While this is not in itself a measure of social background, it can be interpreted alongside findings from the parental occupation question described above.

The statistics below show the proportion of Costs Lawyers that had at least one parent who attended university and gained a degree. We do not draw any conclusions about the proportion of Costs Lawyers who were ‘first in family’ to attend university, not least because it is not a requirement that Costs Lawyers themselves attend university in order to undertake their professional qualification. We have also provided benchmarking data for other groups, although that data was collected using slightly different questions to the one we asked, so comparisons should be drawn with caution.¹³

Proportion of group with a parent who attended university



¹² See <https://socialmobilityworks.org/toolkit/financial-and-professional-measurement/>.

¹³ For solicitors, 2019 data reported by the Solicitors Regulation Authority at <https://www.sra.org.uk/solicitors/resources/diversity-toolkit/law-firm-diversity-tool-2/>. For all graduates, 2020 data reported by the Social Mobility Commission at <https://socialmobilityworks.org/toolkit/financial-and-professional-measurement/>.

Career progression

We asked participants about their current job level, as an indicator of their career progression after entering the profession. Of course, job level will be influenced by a number of factors, including experience obtained before and after qualifying as a Costs Lawyer. However, if the data was to show a close correlation between practitioners' career success/seniority and measures of social mobility, it may be possible to infer a causal link between socio-economic background and career progression.

Our conclusion is that nothing in the statistics below indicates that socio-economic background is presenting a barrier to progression in the Costs Lawyer profession.

Current job level¹⁴	Parental occupation at age 14	
	Professional	Lower
Junior employed lawyer or sole practitioner	48%	34%
Mid-level employed lawyer or sole practitioner	53%	32%
Senior employed lawyer or sole practitioner	48%	33%
Partner or business owner with employees	39%	36%

Current job level	Proportion of Costs Lawyers that:	
	Had a parent who attended university	Attended an independent school (no bursary)
Junior employed lawyer or sole practitioner	48%	34%
Mid-level employed lawyer or sole practitioner	53%	32%
Senior employed lawyer or sole practitioner	48%	33%
Partner or business owner with employees	39%	36%

¹⁴ Participants were asked: "Which of the following best describes your current job level?"

More information

The Annex to this report contains the raw data from the three social mobility questions asked in the survey. If you would like further information about any of the data presented in this report, or would like access to the raw data on comparative metrics (such as age, job level, gender or practising region), please [contact us](#).

You can find additional data relating to the Costs Lawyer profession (including diversity data) on the [Data About Costs Lawyers](#) page of the CLSB's website.

Annex

Raw data from the three social mobility questions

Question 1: What was the occupation of your main household earner when you were aged about 14?

Answer choices	Response rate	Number
Modern or traditional professional occupations such as: teacher, nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, musician, police officer (sergeant or above), software designer, accountant, solicitor/barrister/judge, medical practitioner, scientist, civil / mechanical engineer	33.3%	86
Senior, middle, or junior managers or administrators such as: finance manager, chief executive, large business owner, office manager, retail manager, bank manager, restaurant manager, warehouse manager	14.0%	36
Clerical and intermediate occupations such as: secretary, personal assistant, call centre agent, clerical worker, nursery nurse	7.0%	18
Technical and craft occupations such as: motor mechanic, plumber, printer, electrician, gardener, train driver	12.8%	33
Routine, semi-routine manual and service occupations such as: postal worker, machine operative, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, sales assistant, HGV driver, cleaner, porter, packer, labourer, waiter/waitress, bar staff	19.8%	51
Long-term unemployed (claimed Jobseeker's Allowance or earlier unemployment benefit for more than a year)	1.6%	4
Small business owners who employed less than 25 people such as: corner shop owners, small plumbing companies, retail shop owner, single restaurant or cafe owner, taxi owner, garage owner	6.6%	17
Other such as: retired, this question does not apply to me, I don't know	2.3%	6
I prefer not to say	2.7%	7
Total		258

Question 2: What type of school did you mainly attend between ages 11 and 16?

Answer choices	Response rate	Number
State-run or state-funded: selective on academic, faith or other grounds	25.2%	65
State-run or state-funded: non-selective	61.6%	159
Independent / fee-paying: where I received a bursary covering 90% or more of my tuition	3.5%	9
Independent / fee-paying: no bursary	5.4%	14
Attended school outside the UK	3.5%	9
I prefer not to say	0.8%	2
Total		258

Question 3: Did either of your parents attend university and gain a degree (e.g. BA/BSc or equivalent) by the time you were 18?

Answer choices	Response rate	Number
No, neither of my parents attended university	75.2%	194
Yes, one or both of my parents attended university	23.6%	61
Do not know / not sure	0.8%	2
I prefer not to say	0.4%	1
Total		258