

## **Devon & Somerset Law Society Annual Membership Survey 2010**

### **Executive Summary**

1143 members, affiliate and associate members were asked to participate in the second annual membership survey. They were asked to rate DASLS services and comment on other aspects of the Society's activities. This year members' views were particularly sought about the annual dinners.

The survey is taken during difficult trading conditions for the Society and its members.

157 returns were received; just 13.74% of the membership. This is a disappointing result being about two thirds of the response in 2009. The geographical spread of response appears to be representative of the membership in the area. Approximately 85% of respondents work in private practice, the remainder being retired, unemployed or working in-house within local government and commerce. 13% of returns were from individuals who are currently a member of a DASLS committee or have been in recent years. Whilst the number of returns is lower than in 2009 it is thought that they represent an appropriate cross section of the membership.

There are no significant changes in how the services are rated indicating that DASLS has, in the opinion of those responding, successfully maintained its high standards throughout the difficult economic climate.

Of those using the service area concerned, 96% of respondents said DASLS training services were Excellent or Good. 94% said the same about recruitment, 95% about help with complaints, 92% for international relations and 90% for the newsletter and social events.

Buzz, the Newsletter and Mediation gained approval from 88%, 85% and 84% of users respectively.

The Society's use of social media (Facebook / Twitter) was only rated Excellent or Good by 60% by those who had used it although a further 35% rated this as average.

Training, Buzz and the Newsletter were the services most used by members whilst social media, mediation and complaints handling were least used. There has been some decrease in the use of training and recruitment services in the last twelve months; this was expected and reflects the squeeze on training budgets and that fewer firms are recruiting.

The support of DASLS staff is appreciated and overall the feedback about DASLS activities is reassuring; a typical comment being "*A jolly good, well run and friendly Society. A big thank you to all*". There are some requests for more events away from the Exeter area in North Devon and Somerset.

Comments about the Buzz e-Bulletin, introduced since the last survey, suggest that it has improved communications and is very useful.

75% to 78% of respondents say that they are generally aware or very aware of the work of the Main Committee as well as the Education & Training and the Social Sub-Committees. That range drops to between 60% and 52% for the other Sub-Committees.

It is difficult to draw a conclusion from the returns about the Devon and Somerset dinners. 36% of respondents had attended at least one Devon dinner but only 13% for the Somerset function. Nearly half of those who responded said that they would support a combined annual dinner (a number did not say) but the many comments on the topic give a mixed message. Whilst there is no clear lead about whether there should be one or two dinners, many respondents say they would not go in any event. Others say that it is important to have overnight accommodation available in situ. There are comments about the format and some criticise the dinners as being overly formal and expensive. Moreover they are not appealing to younger lawyers and that a more 'fun' event should be considered. There are suggestions of a summer ball noting that the two dinners are relatively close to each other albeit at each end of the winter. There are also ideas about local lunches / dinners in various regions of the two counties. There is a strong body of support for continuation of the current arrangements.

This year there is an increase in members that would like to receive information by e.mail. 65.8% now say they wish to receive the Newsletter in this form (up from 52.6% in 2009) and over 83% would prefer to have training, social and other notices electronically (up by 10% on 2009).

There is a strong feeling amongst respondents that the Society is supportive and provides a useful local network within which views and information can be exchanged.

Members believe DASLS is well run and offers a strong voice at Chancery Lane and beyond. It performs well in its training and recruitment operations and communicates well through the Newsletter and Buzz. The social events are enjoyed and the Challenge Cup is thought to be a good initiative. Members say they would like to see more PR and lobbying activity.

There is a number of comments about the relevance of the Society's international activity and travel especially in the current climate.

The overall conclusion is that DASLS is on the right track and is maintaining its high standards. It should:

- Investigate opportunities to hold more events away from Exeter.
- Do more to communicate the work of all its Committees to the membership.
- Continue to develop the existing services.
- Maintain its lobbying activities and where possible promote the profession within the region.
- Continue to make information available by e.mail.
- Consider imposing a reduction in its international work.